

Tho Jackson

T W E N T Y
S E R M O N S
O N
V A R I O U S S U B J E C T S,
P R E A C H E D i n t h e
C A T H E D R A L C H U R C H
O F
L I C H F I E L D.

By *T H O M A S W H I T E*, M. A.
P R E B E N D A R Y of the said Church.



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TWENTY
SERMONS

ON
VARIOUS SUBJECTS

PREACHED IN THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH

OF

LICHFIELD



By THOMAS M. A.

PREBENDARY of the said Church



LONDON

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S E R M O N I.

On SINCERITY in LOVE.

ROM. xii. 9.

Let love be without dissimulation.

CONSCIOUS that Love is the great characteristic of the Christian religion, and the peculiar precept of it's divine author—the primitive professors of christianity were remarkably eminent for the practice of this virtue: they were all of them, upon this account, at once the admiration and envy of the heathen, amongst whom they dwelt.

And, with a view of securing to this virtuous principle its native purity; to prevent its being adulterated with improper

B

mix-

mixtures, or abused with false imitations: that no one, under a pretence of Love, should take an opportunity to flatter and seduce, to deceive, betray and injure: the apostle here enjoins "That our Love be without dissimulation;" founded on the dictates of sincerity and truth, and productive of suitable effects. And unless it be thus founded, and thus display'd, the very essence of Love is entirely lost: for insincerity is not to be consider'd as a bare imperfection in Love; since it not only obscures the lustre, deforms the beauties, and depreciates the merits of this sublime passion, but subverts and destroys its very being.

I shall not, however, in this discourse, confine this virtue to our fellow-creatures only, but consider it likewise with regard to our Creator, our country and ourselves; since these are the profest objects of our Love, and require an equal share of sincerity.

I. And with regard to that Love which we all have, or would be thought to have,

for our Creator : sincerity requires that we exert this sacred passion with all our faculties and powers ; with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength. It must be such as will inspire an inward pleasure in all our approaches to him, whether in public or private ; and an inward uneasiness, whenever those approaches meet with interruption. Such as will induce us to frequent his holy temple on much nobler motives than the command of any earthly superior, the view of any temporal advantage, the evasion of a penalty, or to gain and support a religious character amongst men ; never suffering any trifling engagement, any scene of diversion, nor even any slight complaint, to hinder us from paying our regular and habitual devotions ; but esteeming one day in his courts better than a thousand : such as will induce us to read his word with frequency and attention, with delight and eagerness ; whilst we discover beauties far transcending the sublimest flights of human composition ; and

receive a higher satisfaction and a more pleasing entertainment, than from all the more fashionable volumes of plays, novels, and romances.

Love, thus grounded, will influence an entire submission to his will, and an impartial, unreserved obedience to his laws; will make us sacrifice every darling passion rather than displease him whom we love: studious to avoid offending him in our own person, and deeply grieved at seeing him offended by others: pierced to the heart when we hear his sacred name profaned by daring imprecations, or used with an indecent familiarity! it will raise our thoughts and desires far above this world; and all its enjoyments: will suppress all our keen fondness of life; and in a great measure subdue the fears of death; whilst, contemplating the felicities of a future state, our soul hath a desire, and even longing to enter into those celestial courts, where our Love will be firmly and inseparably united to its object; freed from all those coldnesses and intermissions, which

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every

every pious Christian, in his present imperfect state, both feels and deplores !

2. With regard to the Love or Friendship we profess for any of our fellow-creatures ; sincerity excludes every selfish and designing scheme, and earnestly consults the advantage of those we love, both with relation to this life and the next ; disdaining all the mean arts of flattery and superficial complaisance ; fond of bestowing praise wherever there is room for it ; and yet impartially reproofing all errors in their conduct, with a good-natured intention to reclaim them. “ My little children, “ (says St. John *) let us not love in word, “ neither in tongue, but in deed and in “ truth.” An over-acted, cringing profession, tho’ seconded, perhaps, with fervent promises, and solemn protestations, is far from being a certain symptom of sincerity ; it rather includes a strong suspicion of the opposite vice.

In like manner, that friendship or Love by no means deserves the character of sincerity,

B 3

* 1 John iii. 18.

6 *ON SINCERITY in LOVE.*

cere, which can observe and resent every inadvertent action or expression ; and can make every slight clashing of sentiment or interest a pretence for coldness, if not for downright enmity.

It cannot be required that a man should run all lengths to serve his friend ; that we should confound right and wrong, to prove our sincerity and zeal ; tho' some may be so extravagantly unreasonable as to demand or expect such proof.

As for those wretches who can have the baseness to dissemble with a double heart ; who impiously pervert this generous passion, and use it only for a cloak of maliciousness ; who take occasion, under this villainous disguise, to undermine, seduce, and ruin those, who, thro' an unfortunate credulity, become a prey unto them ; 'tis impossible to brand these with a character sufficiently black and detestable. Malice, thus concealed, is much more ungenerous in itself ; and much more destructive in its influence, than that which is open and undisguised. Far from sus-
pecting

pecting any wrong from that quarter, we are quite unguarded and exposed: and the injuries we thence receive give a deeper and more affecting wound, than from another hand they could have done! "It was not (says the Psalmist *) an open enemy that hath done me this dishonour, for then I could have borne it: neither was it mine adversary that rose up against me, for then, peradventure, I would have hid myself from him: but (to heighten the distress) it was even thou my companion, my guide, and mine own familiar friend!"

With regard to our Love for those whom death has deprived us of: as we piously hope that they are now in a state of rest and happiness infinitely beyond what this world can afford; the sincerity of that Love is but ill exprest by an extravagance of grief, and deluges of tears, whilst pretending to bewail them, we are really, all the while, bewailing ourselves. Much more suitable, as well as more prudent,

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would

* Psalm lv. 12, 13.

would it be to give a different turn to our thoughts, and consider, not what we have lost, but what they have gain'd: and instead of wasting our time in fruitless sighs and complaints, employ it to much better purpose, in striving to qualify ourselves for that blissful state which they have already attained to: that so we may again be united to their dear society, never to be parted any more!

3. To the Love of our neighbour we may join that of our country: a Love, which all are fond of professing, from the highest down to the meanest native: ardent in their wishes for its prosperity, and zealous for its honour and reputation.

The good of our country we indeed naturally wish for, even from the principle of self-love; since every advantage which accrues to the public extends, in some measure, to each individual.

Happy would it be, if this profession were always to be found honest and sincere, unmix'd with any selfish or mercenary views; not bias'd by prejudice, nor distorted

distorted by the headlong violence of party-zeal ! if a principle, so benevolent and generous in its own nature, were always to be exerted in a suitable manner, agreeably to the dictates of religion, and calm reason, and attended with a decent share of charity for those whose sentiments, tho' not intentions, differ from our own !

4. It may seem to be a task quite needless and superfluous, to advise any one to love himself ; since every one is naturally supposed to do this, with the utmost sincerity ; without disguise, and without reserve. Too many, indeed, there are who carry their self-love (what we call their self-love) to an undue and criminal extreme, and make it the foundation and reigning motive of almost all their actions. This disingenuous and sordid principle we may, if we please, distinguish by the title of selfishness ; but it can never, with any sort of propriety, be called self-love ; since, instead of promoting their true and real interest, they take a great deal of pains to weaken and destroy it. I speak not this, indeed,
merely

merely with regard to their temporal interest; tho' even in this respect 'tis far from being prudent; since the fordid wretch is sure to expose himself to universal contempt and abhorrence. To be thus condemn'd and abhor'd, and to be frequently made sensible that they are so, must needs be attended with some degree of uneasiness and pain: but this uneasiness, perhaps, may be stifled, at least superseded, by the pleasing thoughts of that gain which their selfish conduct may produce: we will therefore suppose it to be no greater than what they can inure themselves to bear.

But certainly the calculation of a Christian's interest should never be confin'd to this transient life; this were reducing ourselves to a level with the beasts that perish. And how can that man be ever said to love himself, who disregards his better and immortal part, the soul? And not only disregards it, whilst negligent in preparing it for future bliss, but industriously exposes it to future and eternal misery. Even with regard to the body; how can the voluptuous

tuous be said to love that? when, by luxurious and criminal indulgences, 'tis not only exposed to a various train of severe and shocking distempers in the present life, but render'd obnoxious to future torments, which the pleasure that arises from sensual gratifications bears no proportion to! How harsh and absurd soever it may sound in the ears of the sensualist, self-denial and self-mortification are the truest symptoms of self-love properly so call'd.

There are some, even within the compass of our personal knowledge, to whom, tho' guilty of the highest indiscretions, we are willing to lend our compassion, and, in some measure, our esteem; and are wont to say (by way of softening their character) "Tis great pity! such a one is
" a good-natur'd man, and no one's enemy
" my but his own." His own enemy the debauchee most certainly is, and that in a much higher degree than 'tis in the power of any other person to be. The most virulent enemies he has, or can have, (even supposing their power equal to their inclination)

nation) can only injure him in his temporal concerns; whilst he himself, by a most unnatural and monstrous barbarity, endangers and destroys his own happiness, both in this world, and the next!

From these and all such instances of dissimulation let our Love be always free; whilst, with proper seriousness we reflect, how odious in itself, and how fatal in its consequences, all insincerity will prove: how painful a task it needs must be to be always acting a constrained part, and to lie under a constant apprehension of having the mask pull'd off, or seen thro', and all the hollowness and treachery of our hearts laid open.

What tho', for a while, we may impose upon our fellow-creatures, and carry on a deceitful or self-interested scheme with safety and success; we, probably, shall not do it long: or suppose we should, yet we cannot be ignorant that there will come a day, when the thoughts of every heart, the most secret delusions and intrigues, will be manifestly exposed; not only to the nar-

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row circle of our acquaintance, but to the whole race of men, and to all the host of heaven. When shame and confusion of face will more particularly be the lot of the painted hypocrite, the treacherous friend, the delusive lover, and the self-interested patriot.

On the other hand, really to be what we would appear to be, is attended with no trouble, and is the surest method of procuring, not only the secret applauses of our own breasts, but the confidence, esteem, and cordial affection of all around us.

As, therefore, we value our happiness, both present and future; let all our expressions flow from our inward sentiments; and let all our actions confirm and crown our expressions.

Let the Love or friendship we profess for our fellow-creatures be never polluted with the least mixture of dissimulation, treachery, or sordid interest. Let us disdain to prostitute so sublime a passion to such mean and villainous purposes; sincere

cere unto others, as we would they should be unto us.

Let the Love we bear to our country, our public-spiritedness, shine forth in a quiet and chearful submission to our country's laws; a firm, unshaken loyalty to our gracious sovereign, fervent and daily prayers for the welfare and prosperity of both; and that the growing evils of licentiousness, luxury, and corruption, those fatal underminers of even the best establishments, may never rise to such a height, as to ruin or endanger our happy constitution! Striving, at the same time, to cultivate universal harmony and union, and to suppress those invidious distinctions, which serve to disturb the peace and ruin the happiness of society.

Let our self-love induce us to pursue our eternal interest in preference to our temporal; to make the one duly subservient to the other; and whenever they rise in competition, chearfully to sustain the utmost inconveniences, losses and afflictions, rather

ON SINCERITY IN LOVE. 15

than run the least hazard of forfeiting immortal happiness.

And, to crown the whole, let the Love we owe to our Creator, tho' alas! it can never be proportionate to the dignity of its object, be earnest and sincere; nor let us impiously pretend to honour him with our lips, whilst our hearts are far from him, too strongly attach'd elsewhere.

A sincere Love of God will exclude all competition; will reign in our hearts unrival'd and supreme; will induce us to regard all other objects, tho' never so splendid and alluring, as dross in comparison of him "by whom the world is crucified to us, and we to the world."

In order to arrive at this happy disposition, which will effectually influence our hearts in all the other instances of our Love; let us daily renew our fervent addresses to that Supreme Being, unto whom "all hearts are open, and all desires known;" that he would withdraw our wandering affections from all improper objects, and fix and unite them to himself:

self: that he would cleanse all the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit; that so we may sincerely and perfectly love him, and worthily magnify his holy name!

In consequence whereof, we shall likewise love our fellow-creatures with due sincerity; and, at the same time, invariably pursue, and effectually advance our own interest, both in this life, and the next.

Which that we may all do, God grant.

SERMON

SERMON II.

On extravagant, superstitious, and
groundless FEARS.

PSALM lüi. 6.

They were afraid where no fear was.

THERE is not any one passion which the author of our being has implanted in us, but what is, or may be conducive to the most useful and advantageous purposes. If directed to proper objects, and kept under due regulation and discipline, the passions are of the utmost service to our nature. But if misapplied, or inordinately indulged; then instead of being subservient to our happiness, they become the instruments of sin, uneasiness, and misery.

Thus, the passion of Fear, when restrained within its proper bounds, the

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bounds of reason and religion, is certainly of great use in the conduct of human life. It keeps us always on our guard amidst a dangerous and deceitful world; warns us of approaching danger, and puts us upon using proper methods to avoid it. But if once 'tis suffered to exceed its due limits; if it is fix'd on improper objects, and grows extravagant, vain and superstitious; then, instead of proving serviceable to us, 'tis one of the greatest misfortunes, one of the heaviest burdens, the mind of man can labour under. It never fails, indeed, to warn us of impending danger; it will do this when there is not the least occasion for it, and to supply the want of real dangers, will industriously create fictitious ones: it will cast a gloom over both the present and future scenes of life, and be ever displaying to the mind an alarming prospect of dangers, distresses, and mournful events, which, 'tis probable, never may, perhaps impossible they ever should, happen. It makes those accidents appear as evil, which are far from being really so, and

and aggravates the weight and pressure of those that really are. Hence frequently hysterics, despair, distraction, and sometimes death itself; or, which is worse than death, a comfortless and gloomy life, to be always expecting, and therefore always enduring misery!

To this passion, thus unreasonably indulg'd, we may impute half of the evils we endure: as if the unavoidable calamities of life were not sufficiently numerous and burdensome, we must needs swell their number, and make the load still more heavy, by a superfluous addition of such as are quite imaginary: tho' experience might teach us that imaginary calamities are no less painful and afflictive than those that are real.

Besides, how officious soever immoderate fear may be in warning us of dangers, and tho' the alarm be true, 'tis far from promoting our security, or putting us in a proper way to avoid them.

'Tis the peculiar unhappiness of this passion, that it baffles and defeats its own

design. The original design of fear is self-preservation. But immoderate fear (as 'tis elegantly describ'd by the author of the book of Wisdom *) is a betraying of the succours which reason offers; and we may add religion too. It leaves us quite defenceless and exposed; overwhelms and stupifies the understanding, relaxes the nerves, depresses the spirits, congeals the blood; and consequently robs us of the power of avoiding the dangers we are so excessively afraid of. Even brute creatures naturally insult those who discover any symptoms of this degenerate passion. And no wonder, since cowardice degrades the dignity of our nature, and forfeits our claim to that sovereignty over the whole creation, which God, in the beginning, gave to man.

Of all our passions, Fear, immoderately indulg'd, is the most absurd as well as the most painful. The most absurd, since all our other passions, aversion, love, resentment, shame, revenge, hope, joy, grief, &c.

* Wisd. xvii. 12.

&c. are founded on objects that have a real existence.

But this passion, not content with the compass of nature, is often fix'd on vain chimæras and mere impossibilities; on such objects as no where exist, but in the wild delirious notions of a depraved imagination.

'Tis the most painful too; since our other passions, how uneasy soever they may prove whilst they engross the mind, are yet but short and transient, comparatively speaking, and softened with frequent intervals and intermissions: but an extravagant, superstitious dread is a lasting and perpetual torment.

The rest, how turbulent or corrosive soever they may be in our waking hours, are yet sooth'd by sleep: grief itself, even the deepest grief, is then lost in oblivion. But this teasing passion interferes with our natural rest, and disquiets us, not only when we are awake, but even when asleep.

Various are the causes whence this disturber of our quiet is deriv'd. Some have a disposition naturally timorous, their constitution gives it them; but not to such a degree as to exceed the power of reason and religion to alleviate: their indulging it therefore to an immoderate degree is not so much their infirmity, as their fault. In others 'tis merely the effect of some distemper, or perhaps may be a distemper itself: these, therefore, are not to be blam'd, but pitied: in others 'tis entirely owing to the ill-nature or imprudence of those whom in their tender years they have conversed with. 'Tis contracted either by catching the infection in observing their foolish and timorous behaviour, or by having their credulous minds alarmed with terrifying stories, and dreadful descriptions. But as riper reason, if duly applied, will be able to discover the absurdity of these "old wives fables," * 'twill be able also to dissipate the vain Fears thence arising; or if not, religion surely will.

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* 1 Tim. iv. 7.

The timorousness of others may be imputed either to ignorance of natural causes, superstitious interpretations of common events, or the regarding omens, predictions, or the silly arts of divination, &c. To represent and expose the uselessness, inconvenience, and absurdity of these anxieties, should (one might imagine) be sufficient to remove them. For when we calmly reflect how painful as well as useless they are, it must naturally make us cautious how we harbour and indulge them. And when again we reflect how groundless, absurd and ridiculous, how inconsistent with the dictates of reason, as well as of religion they are, shame itself will induce us to drive them away, and not suffer such tyrants to usurp the dominion over us.

In others, the being thus "afraid where no fear is," may be ascribed merely to a consciousness of guilt, and is, indeed, the natural consequence of it. For (as

the author above-quoted * justly observes)

“ wickedness, condemned by her own
 “ witness, is exceeding timorous, and be-
 “ ing prest with conscience is always fore-
 “ casting grievous things.” But since ter-
 rors of this kind admit of no relief, at
 least not whilst the cause of them sub-
 sists : since they are inflicted by the search-
 er of all hearts, as a present punishment,
 as a foretaste of those torments which (un-
 less repentance intervene) the wretches
 must eternally endure hereafter : these I
 shall forbear to treat of, and confine my-
 self to those groundless or extravagant ter-
 rors, which ’tis in the power of argument
 to soften, if not subdue.

To direct, therefore, the passion of Fear
 to its proper object, to restrain it within
 due bounds, to strike out a medium be-
 twixt a vain presumption on one hand,
 and a slavish habitual dread on the other,
 is what I propose to myself in this dis-
 course.

And

And in order thereto, I shall

1. Consider the most common objects and original causes of extravagant, groundless, and superstitious Fear, together with the painful consequences 'tis attended with.

2. By arguments drawn from reason, and more particularly from religion, endeavour to rescue the mind from such superfluous misery, from such unmanly and unchristian cowardice.

And certainly the utmost care should be taken to guard the mind against all vain terrors ; since not only our ease and our interest, but our duty too is concerned in our indulging them.

To begin therefore with the most common and universal object of this passion, death ; the dread of which most of our other extravagant Fears are founded upon ; if therefore we can but subdue or alleviate this Fear, the rest will be easily subdued.

The Fear of death is indeed natural to all the sons of men ; 'tis therefore extremely difficult, perhaps impossible to
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root it out ; but over-rul'd and superseded it may be by passions of a different nature, and very often has been. Grief, despair, ambition, love of liberty, zeal for their native realm, &c. &c. have often reconcil'd even heathens themselves to death, and turn'd the Fear of it into an eager and impatient desire ; and certainly christians have much stronger motives both to condemn and to wish for death.

It has often been observ'd, and laid down as a maxim, that 'tis impossible to enjoy life till we have conquer'd the fear of losing it : and the observation seems very just, since (how pleasing soever our situation may be) we can have no cordial relish of those pleasures which we are under an habitual apprehension of being rob'd of. It may, indeed, be considered by the sensual part of mankind as a motive to the false pleasures of intemperance ; may induce them to stupify and intoxicate themselves, in order to stifle and suppress the thoughts of futurity ; as was the common practice in the heathen world, "let

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“ us eat and drink, for to-morrow we
 “ die !” But this deserves not the name of
 true enjoyment, of real pleasure ; 'tis but
 a transient relaxation of pain.

Fear is the strongest of all our passions,
 and too powerful a rival for joy, even in
 the gayest scenes of life. 'Twill damp
 all our sprightliest amusements ; and a
 painful anxiety for the future will re-
 strain us from enjoying the present ! and
 if this our anxiety would avail us any
 thing ; if the dread of death were a guard
 against it, we then should have some ex-
 cuse for indulging so uneasy a passion. But
 alas ! it frequently produces an opposite
 effect. Many have died thro' the very
 apprehension of dying : and how fre-
 quently do we hasten our fate by the me-
 thods we apply to keep it off ; and con-
 tract disorders by too anxiously endeavour-
 ing to prevent them ?

Not but that we ought to take all pro-
 per care of our health. Health is certain-
 ly the greatest of all earthly enjoyments ;
 'tis this that gives a relish to all other en-

joyments; and without it life is a burden: 'tis, indeed, a blessing which none can justly value, but they who have felt the want of it. To be duly careful, therefore, to preserve it where it is, and to recover it where it is not, is both our interest and our duty: but to be perpetually alarm'd with imaginary distempers; to depress our spirits with melancholy apprehensions; to be ever swallowing down nauseous medicines by way of prevention, when there is no real or necessary cause; to adopt and transfer to ourselves almost every disorder, which we either see or hear a description of; to suffer every trifling accident to make us ill, and to look upon every trifling illness as a certain harbinger of death: this deserves not the name of life, 'tis dying even whilst we live. Such an immoderate Fear of death is certainly more painful than death itself. Besides, we can die but once; and this is almost in a literal sense of the apostle's words, "to die daily."

'Tis greatly to be feared, that they who are so extremely fond of life, and so ex-

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travagantly afraid of death, are not equally solicitous either to improve the one as they ought, nor to prepare themselves for the other. If their continuance in this world be so very precarious as they persuade themselves it is; it behoves them to be particularly careful in providing for the next: and instead of being so deplorably anxious for a painful uncertain existence here below, they should strive to subdue the Fears of death by that never-failing remedy, a devout and holy life.

In like manner, to live under the perpetual and painful expectation of any contagious distemper—as it betrays a want of fortitude in us, considered as men; so does it betray a deplorable want of faith, and pious hope, consider'd as christians. 'Tis making ourselves miserable for an uncertain event; a disorder which may never happen, or, at least, may happen much more favourably than our affrighted imagination conceives and represents.

But be it remembered, that this Fear, if indulg'd and yielded to, will embitter
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36 *On* EXTRAVAGANT, SUPERSTITIOUS,

and destroy every enjoyment of life ; that such an habitual dread is more injurious to our constitution, than probably the disorder itself would prove ; 'tis not only painful, but quite unserviceable with regard to our safety ; instead of keeping off the infection, 'twill contribute to hasten its approach, and, by depressing the spirits, expose us to the power and violence of what we dread.

How much more consistent with prudence and piety would it be (after having taken proper caution to prevent, or, in cases of more immediate danger, proper methods to soften the distemper) calmly to submit ourselves to the gracious disposal of our God ; cheer'd with an humble and pious hope, that he will either avert the evil, or support us under it, or else receive our departing souls into his eternal kingdom !

2. The next instance is one of a most gloomy and distressful sort, demanding all the tenderness of compassion, since none but the sincerely pious are tormented with

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it. 'Tis their misfortune, and not their fault, to be perpetually terrified with dismal prospects and apprehensions with regard to their future allotment; to imagine themselves guilty of the grossest crimes, rejected of God, and blotted out of the book of life! and (to make their case still more deplorable) all the various encouragements and supports, which either reason or religion can afford, instead of relieving, enlarge their terrors! 'Tis their peculiar unhappiness to place every thing in the worst view, and to turn the edge of every argument against themselves. And the more strong and convincing any argument is in its own nature, the deeper is the pain it gives, when thus perverted and misapplied! but that their fears are groundless, their very uneasiness declares. A heart thus broken and contrite, tho' stain'd with real guilt, God himself has assur'd us he will not despise. But the Fears we are now considering are not the effect of real, but imaginary crimes; such as are deriv'd, not from a wounded

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conscience, but a melancholy habit of body; and therefore a discreet use of proper medicines, and proper exercise, is the surest method to dissipate and dispel them, by furnishing brisker spirits, and consequently brighter thoughts.

3. As for (what we call) natural antipathies, they, 'tis to be feared, are so deeply rooted, as to be quite beyond the power of reason, or even of religion, to erase. 'Tis, however, strongly to be suspected, that the generality of them are not so much natural as acquired: some little original dislike, perhaps, by long habitual indulgence, improv'd and heighten'd into a fixt aversion, so as to create a shock at the sight of any object we have entertain'd an abhorrence of.

Some antipathies, indeed, are natural and unavoidable. The most resolute and intrepid will shrink back at the sight of venomous creatures, particularly serpents; these we universally, and by mere instinct, dread; even that species of them which is reputed not to be venomous. But this^o may be accounted for; (which few antipathies

pathies can :) this we may trace up to the fall of our first parents, and that sentence of the almighty—"I will put enmity (or "antipathy) betwixt the serpent and thee.*" But for any rational creature so violently to dread the approach or appearance of animals entirely harmless, is, in a most preposterous manner, to be "afraid where "no fear is!" Terrors of this kind seem to be derived, not from instinct, but mere affectation; and if so, they meet with a proper punishment.

Considering the pernicious influence which these frights are often known to have, both upon the mind and body, we ought to be ever careful not to indulge them in ourselves, nor to soothe and encourage them in others: and if, in our younger years, we have receiv'd the painful impression, we must endeavour to divest the mind of it, as far as we can, and by the help of calm reason strive to alleviate, tho' we cannot entirely subdue a weakness so destructive of the ease and happiness of life.

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* Gen. iii. 15.

4. Another cause of needless and exorbitant fear is a superstitious observation of dreams. They who indulge this unhappy turn of thought seldom fail of being haunted with uncouth images and representations in the night-season ; which (as they are pleased to interpret them) always portend something terrible, disastrous and fatal ; disappointments, losses, sicknesses, deaths, and funerals ! And by this means, sleep, which was given us for the relief of the mind, and the repose and relaxation of the body, proves injurious to both.

The Jews, indeed, were wont to pay a great regard to dreams. But they had some reason for it. God, who at sundry times, and in diverse manners, reveal'd himself in time past to the fathers, was pleased to make use of this manner of revelation amongst the rest, and frequently declar'd his will in dreams and visions of the night. But having now made a full and perfect revelation of himself and his will by his Son whom he hath sent ; all
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former methods of revelation are superseded, and (unless on very extraordinary occasions) laid aside. And, on such occasions, supernatural dreams may sometimes, perhaps, be still vouchsafed. But in the common and ordinary course of nature, to pretend to explain and lay a stress upon such romantic, volatile, and illusive ideas as our dreams impart; to imagine there can be ought prophetic in the fumes of an undigested supper; in a wild, imperfect and incoherent recollection of yesterday's thoughts or actions; betrays a wretched want of right reason!

Nor did the Jews themselves pay them an universal regard: far from that. Solomon (we know) was favour'd with a particular vouchsafement of this kind: "in Gibeon the Lord appear'd to Solomon in a dream by night. *" Yet Solomon himself imputes the generality of dreams to a cause far from supernatural: "a dream cometh thro' the multitude of business. †" And addressing himself to those

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* 1 Kings iii. 5.

† Eccles. v. 3.

those who suffered their spirits to be oppressed with alarms of this sort, and seem'd, by so doing, to throw off all confidence in the most High, "in the multitude of
 "dreams (says he) are diverse vanities,
 "but fear thou the Lord. *"
 And the same character is bestow'd on them by the son of Sirach: "whoso regardeth dreams
 "is like him that catcheth at a shadow,
 "and followeth after the wind. †"

5. A large share of our irrational, idle, and unmanly Fears we may impute to prejudices and strong prepossessions imbibed in our childhood; instill'd into us at a Time of life, when we were yet incapable of judging how vain, ridiculous and absurd they are. Fear is a passion of a most infectious nature. And some people seem to take a pleasure, a thoughtless and cruel pleasure, in terrifying children with dismal stories of murders, apparitions, omens, prodigies, &c. regardless how deep a foundation they are laying of future pain! How much more consistent with prudence
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* Eccles. v. 7.

† Eccles. xxxiv. 2.

and with piety would it be to guard their tender minds against all such idle notions, by telling them—there is a God; a Being equally infinite in goodness and power; a Being who directs and disposes all events, without whose permission no evil can happen to them; and who never fails to protect those who fear and serve him! How much more prudent and good-natur'd would it be thus to arm and fortify their minds, than to give them such impressions of slavish Fear, as afterwards, perhaps, the united force of reason and religion may not be able to erase! From prepossessions of this kind arises all that strong habitual dread of frightful apparitions, and dire accidents, which many even of riper years are possess'd with, and know not how to shake off. Hence the being alarm'd at every noise, and every appearance, which they cannot immediately account for. Hence too the silly childish Fear of being alone, or in the dark: with other fantastic terrors, equally absurd in themselves, and painful in their influence!

The foolishness and even impiety of these Fears we might soon be convinc'd of, by reflecting—that the presence of an helpless infant, or even a dumb animal, is sufficient to mitigate, perhaps to remove them : but we forget that Supreme Being, who at all times, and in all places, is present with us, and whose holy angels encamp around those who trust in him. * Let then the irreligious and prophane, they who live without God in the world, whose minds and thoughts are blacken'd with conscious guilt : and they who, relying on the strength of their own weak and depraved reason, disdain the aids and comforts of reveal'd religion : let such tremble at spectres of their own forming : let such be (as one * of their most admir'd authors was) afraid of solitude and darkness : but let all those who profess themselves christians, and behave consistently with that title, be asham'd to entertain a Fear so distrustful of the divine protection, and

* Psalm xxxiv. 7.

† Mr. Hobbes.

and so injurious to the serenity of their own minds.

6. Another source of this uneasy passion is the regarding (what we call) omens; the turning common and insignificant accidents, and the ordinary appearances and operations of nature, into sad presages of future calamity.

'Tis impossible to enumerate all the various instances of this kind, and impossible to express how very industrious some weak and superstitious minds are in collecting uneasiness from them: but these are the mere dregs of heathenish superstition, and such as ought not to be nam'd amongst christians; much less observ'd and made the objects of terror: several of the heathens themselves had sense enough to disregard, despise, and ridicule them.*

7. But of all the causes of immoderate Fear, thunder and lightning may be considered as not the least predominant or universal. These have the power to shock even the most devout minds; however

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* Menander, &c.

inconsistent such a sensation may appear with the dictates of religion, and that pious, firm, and serene confidence which religion tends to inspire.

That a mind burden'd and oppress'd with conscious guilt should be alarm'd at a sound so dreadful, and so expressive of the divine wrath, seems not at all surprising. Guilt (as was before observ'd) is naturally timorous; and the wretch may well apprehend that the vengeful stroke will fall on his devoted head. But that the innocent, the virtuous and devout, who have "set God alway before them," and whose hearts are possess'd with a full persuasion of his power and goodness; that they should tremble and turn pale; that they should be thrown into terrors and agonies with it; to what shall we impute this, unless to the overbearing power of prepossession and habit, or a deplorable weakness of nerves? For as to the danger which attends upon thunder and lightning; tho' they may sometimes prove fatal, yet there is not one in an hundred thousand they are fatal

to: whilst, on the other hand, (we may safely assert) where they destroy one life, they contribute to preserve an hundred thousand, by purifying the air, in dispersing those noxious vapours and exhalations which would otherwise make the breath we draw infectious.

I would not be thought to recommend a presumptuous or insensible, much less an indecent behaviour under what the psalmist calls "the voice of God.*" But sure there is a medium betwixt a vain presumption on one hand, and an abject desponding Fear on the other; a very wide difference betwixt tempting God, and trusting in him.

Let, therefore, so solemn and awful a sound be productive of serious and devout thoughts. But let us not be terrified beyond the power of thinking at all; nor (if we are duly careful to deserve it) let us ever despair of the protection of that God, whose all-powerful word thunder and lightning, wind and storm obediently fulfil.

To him therefore, &c.

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* Psalm xxix. 4.

SERMON III.

On the same subject.

PSALM lv. 6.

They were afraid where no fear was.

HAVING already enquir'd into the most common objects and original causes of extravagant, groundless, and superstitious Fear, and the painful effects it produces : proceed we now to consider by what means we may rescue the mind from its power and tyranny : how we may confine within its proper channel that passion which is so apt to overflow and become inordinate, by fixing it where it should be fix'd.

And the only object which our Fear ought to be directed to, and fix'd upon,

is God : he only is to be fear'd, who only is mighty, who only is the Lord, who alone has power to save, and power to destroy.

By the Fear of God is here meant not an alarming and uneasy dread ; not such as arises from a painful expectation of his wrath and vengeance ; not that kind of Fear which (as St. John observes) “ hath torment, and is inconsistent with perfect love : * ” but such as results from a due sense of his power, justice, and mercy, jointly consider'd : such a reverential awe, mix'd with esteem and love, as (if I may be allow'd so low a comparison) obedient and affectionate children bear to a kind indulgent father, which will ever secure their duty ; will restrain them from doing any thing to displease him, even tho' they were sure of doing it with impunity. And such an awful sense of his divine majesty, join'd with a pious trust and confidence in his goodness, will effectually exclude and extinguish all other terrors which can possibly

* 1 John iv. 18.

possibly assault our hearts, or invade our inward peace.

And hence it is that, in our litany, superstitious and habitual Fear is not rang'd among those calamities which we beg to be deliver'd from, tho' one of the heaviest calamities incident to our nature : but to make up the seeming omission, we afterwards beseech God "to give us an heart "to love and dread him ;" and this is a certain preservation against any other dread whatsoever.

Fear, thus plac'd, is a firm, and indeed the only foundation of true courage. For it may justly be asserted that no one can be truly brave, unless sincerely good. The abandon'd villain will sometimes, indeed, expose himself to great hazard ; and be or seem to be out of the reach of all Fear : but this deserves not to be esteem'd the effect of courage, but despair ; and despair will make cowardice itself valiant. Others, again, will face danger, not from a true principle of fortitude, but either
blind

blind stupidity or giddy, unthinking rashness.

And as for natural courage, such as arises merely from constitution, from a flow of animal spirits, or a warm imagination : this is often found to forsake a man when he has most occasion to exert it ; ever acting uncertainly and by starts, just as the vigour of health, or warmth of passion serves to inspire it.

But that courage which is deriv'd, not from ourselves, but an omnipotent Being, is always steady, and always the same ; is ever calm, and regular, and uniform ; is a happy medium betwixt a rash presumption on one hand, and an abject timorousness on the other. " Whoso feareth the Lord (says the son of Sirach) shall not fear nor be afraid : for he is his hope and mighty protection, and strong stay ; a defence from heat, a cover from the noon-day sun, a preservation from stumbling, and an help from falling. *

Do

* Ecclus. xxxiv. 14.

Do we then dread the power, malice or rage of our fellow-creatures? "God is our light and our salvation, whom then shall we fear? God is the strength of our life, of whom then shall we be afraid?" What power can hurt us if Omnipotence be our guard, and if God be for us, who or what can be against us?

When the Syrians had encompass'd Dathan with a numerous army, with horses and chariots to seize Elisha; the prophet's servant rising up early, and going out, saw them and was afraid; and, knowing whom they aim'd at, thus express'd his Fear, or rather his despair, "alas! my master, what shall we do?" But Elisha answer'd him, "fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.*" An expression which Hezekiah afterward made use of, on much the same occasion, when Sennacherib with a powerful host had invested Jerusalem. "Be strong and courageous (said he to his terrified subjects) be not afraid

* 2 Kings vi.

afraid for the king of Assyria, nor for
 “all his formidable multitude, for there
 “are more with us than with him; with
 “him, indeed, there is an arm of flesh,
 “but with us is the Lord our God.†” To
 the same purpose is that obscure passage
 in the Psalms (obscure at least in our trans-
 lation) where, says the royal author, “it
 “is he that has deliver’d my soul in peace
 “from the battle that was against me,
 “for there were many with me: *” as
 good as many the original implies; mean-
 ing that omnipotent resistless Being whose
 strength is infinitely superior to the united
 force of even the greatest multitude.

Do we tremble at the thoughts of death?
 if we duly fear God; and, in consequence
 of that Fear, devoutly serve him; and,
 by a sincere obedience, secure to ourselves
 his friendship and favour; we shall find
 no cause to shrink back, at least not with
 violent reluctance, either at the distant
 apprehension, or real approach of it.

’Tis

† 2 Chron. xxxii.

* Psalm lv. 19.

48. *On* EXTRAVAGANT, SUPERSTITIOUS,

'Tis equally our unhappiness and our fault to place death in a much more dreadful view than it deserves. We represent it to ourselves as a scene of insupportable horror, of agonies, convulsions, groans, and ghastly appearances! we consider it as depriving us of the light, and of all the pleasures we have hitherto enjoyed; as consigning us to the darkness of the grave, to worms and putrefaction! In short, we consider it only with regard to this frail body: not reflecting that the soul, our infinitely better part, still survives; deliver'd from the burden of the flesh, and immediatly introduc'd into a state of bliss: that the body itself shall hereafter be reunited to it; not in the ghastly form it now, in death, assumes; but in a state of consummate beauty, strength, and sprightliness never to be lost or impair'd.

We must needs be sensible that we can never be completely happy without the enjoyment of God: that tis impossible to arrive at the enjoyment of him without
passing

passing through the vale of the shadow of death: that death alone can ease us of our present woes, and introduce us into bliss: why then do we make the means of our happiness the object of our aversion and dread?

Amidst the various sicknesses we endure, in which we often feel more torment than even death inflicts; yet, in the utmost severities of the most severe disease, could we be sure that, in a few moments, we should be perfectly at ease, it would soften all our anguish, and our pain would be lost in hope.

Death fixes us beyond the possibility of torment; and instead of being restored to a precarious state of health, they that fear God are then made eternally easy, and eternally happy: and yet we dread this reliever of our woes, this promoter of our happiness, as our formidable enemy!

Grief, despair, thirst of glory, zeal for their own or their country's liberty, &c. have frequently overbalanced the fear of

E

death

death in heathens themselves. Certainly then, an ardent longing after immortality ; an earnest desire to enjoy that God whom, in this life, we cannot perfectly enjoy ; an enlivening expectation of being united to our redeemer in a state of endless bliss ; must be sufficient to inspire a fortitude, such as unenlighten'd reason could not arrive at.

An immoderate fear of death, therefore, in a sincere christian, must entirely be owing to want of thought and reflection. Having naturally entertained a dreadful idea of it, we seldom, alas ! are duly careful to rectify so gross an error in our judgment. We shun the thought of it, as what would damp our pleasures, and cast a gloom over all our enjoyments.

And thus, one mistake introduces another ; for allowing it to be really as dreadful as our prejudic'd fancy represents it ; yet, frequently to think on death would make it more familiar, and, consequently, less frightful to the mind. For the sake, then, of our present ease, as well as our
future

future advantage, we ought to make our latter end the subject of our frequent meditation. Nor let our thoughts dwell so much on the transient and empty pleasures it robs us of; but the substantial unfading joys it conveys to us. Let us not be so partial as to view it in its horrors only; in the pains which we ourselves must feel, the deep concern of those around us, and the mournful solemnities of parting, which must needs enlarge and aggravate our pain: but let us cast our eyes on the bright side of the prospect; on the joy that is set before us; on that redeemer who has overcome the sharpness of death, disarm'd it of its terrors, and open'd the kingdom of heaven to all sincere believers. And then, instead of fearing death, we shall even "long to be dissolv'd, and to be "with Christ!"

Do we labour under an habitual dread of any contagious disease? Let us daily repeat the xcixth. Psalm. This sacred poem was composed in the time of a raging pestilence; a distemper, much more formi-

dable, virulent, and fatal than any infectious disorder which we have room to dread; yet, even in the midst of it, the psalmist displays a firm, unshaken confidence in his God. "Who so dwelleth, &c."

And to suffer the resolution of a Jew to outrival the faith and pious hope of a Christian, were, at once, preposterous and shameful!

We must not, however, turn this our confidence into a vain presumption. Rashly to expose ourselves to the infection is acting contrary to the dictates of instinct, prudence, and duty. To throw ourselves into any unnecessary dangers is to tempt God by unnecessary trials of his power, and providential care. And when the tempter quoted a part of the psalm above-mentioned, to induce our Lord to cast himself down from a pinnacle of the temple, as being secure of the divine protection, he was thus answered, "thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." On the other hand, to distrust his preserving

erving power, when we are duly cautious not to tempt it, and duly solicitous to entitle ourselves to it, is equally sinful in the opposite extreme.

Are we afraid of any terror by night? darkness, spectres, fire, thieves, or frightful dreams? let us call to mind that we have a guardian who never slumbers nor sleeps; a protector who has promised never to fail nor forsake us; a God with whom "the darkness is no darkness at all, but the night is as clear as the day." To his infinite mercy and almighty protection let us humbly and devoutly recommend ourselves, or ever we close our eyes; beseeching him to lighten our darkness, and defend us from all the perils and dangers we so much dread: then "may we lay ourselves down in peace, securely take our rest, and chearfully rise up again; since 'tis God who sustains us, and makes us to dwell in safety." *

In like manner, let us every morning implore his defence against any terrors

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that

* Psalm iv.

that may assault us to day. And then, should we be exposed to perils by land, or perils by water, 'twill enliven our spirits to reflect, that we have laid ourselves under the protection of that God who has said by the mouth of his prophet Isaiah, "fear not, for I am thy God, thy saviour; when thou passest thro' the waters, I will be with thee, and thro' the rivers they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest thro' the fire, thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." *

Are thunder and lightning the objects of our terror? let us, with humble confidence look up to that God who first gave us our being, and who has ever since preserved us in it, amidst innumerable and unseen dangers. Whose preserving power, were it but for one moment suspended or withdrawn, we should unavoidably and immediately sink into our original dust, not only when we apprehend danger, but even when we imagine
our-

* Is. xliii.

ourselves altogether secure. And let us propose to our imitation the intrepid fortitude of the royal Psalmist in cases more alarming and more dangerous.

Earthquakes, when violent (as in hot climates they frequently prove) are much more dreadful in their nature, and make much greater havock than thunder and lightning are ever known to make. And from that remarkable one which happened in Uzziah's reign, mention'd by the prophets Zechariah and Amos *, we may conclude that they were sometimes extremely violent in Judæa: "yet (says the Psalmist) God is
 " our hope and strength, a very present
 " (propitious) help in trouble. There-
 " fore will we not fear, tho' the earth be
 " moved, and the hills carried into the
 " midst of the sea, &c." †

Are we alarmed at omens, prodigies, predictions, or the like? the fear of that God whose over-ruling providence directs and disposes all events; a just apprehension of his power and watchful protec-

E 4 tion

* Zech. xiv. 5. Amos i. 1. † Ps. xlv.

tion will exclude all anxieties of this kind, and inspire us with a due, contemptuous disregard of all such idle, senseless, and irreligious notions, equally inconsistent with our ease and our duty.

'Tis not, indeed, to be expected that the force of [argument will immediately suppress or restrain those terrors which have seized the mind by way of surprise. When fearfulness and trembling come suddenly upon us, and an unexpected dread overwhelms us; reason has not power to recollect its forces, at least, not to exert them with advantage: for when our spirits are once flutter'd, fear is sure to betray all the succours which reason offers, and the more we strive to think, the more we are terrified. We must, therefore, endeavour to arrive at such an habitual firmness and presence of mind as may (in a great measure) prevent all surprises and shocks of this kind; and that no dangers or unforeseen distresses may find us unprepared, or unable to sustain them.

And

And if we duly pursue that advice of the prophet "sanctify the Lord of hosts, "and let him be your fear, and let him "be your dread *;" we shall find a sanctuary from all danger, and even from the apprehension of it.

Or if, thro' the infirmity of our nature, we should at any time be alarmed; yet, if we call to mind—whom we fear, and whom we trust in; our terrors will vanish, like the terrors of a dream when one awaketh.

Tho' "troubled on every side, yet "shall we not be distressed; tho' perplex'd "yet not in despair; tho' persecuted yet "not forsaken." †

If we lift up our eyes unto the heavens from whence cometh our help; he that dwelleth in the heavens will either avert the evil, or support us under it, or turn the seeming affliction into a real blessing.

Timorous and helpless tho' we are of ourselves; his goodness will, at once, pity and

* Is. viii. 13.

† 2 Cor. iv. 8.

58. *On* EXTRAVAGANT, SUPERSTITIOUS,

and relieve our weakness, and endue our souls with much strength. Our heart, thus inspir'd, will stand fast, and never shrink. Our soul shall dwell at ease, secure in the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, our creator, our preserver, our friend, our patron, our guardian, our father ! he shall set us upon the rock that is higher than we ; and so strongly fix our resolution, that no alarm of terror shall be able to move it at any time.

Then (as the wise man expresses it)
“ when we lie down, we shall not be a-
“ fraid ; yea, we shall lie down, and
“ our sleep shall be sweet : neither shall
“ we be afraid of sudden fear, for the
“ Lord shall be our confidence, and
“ shall keep our feet from being ta-
“ ken.” *

And in that last and severest trial of our fortitude, the hour of death ; when the highest constitutional courage will languish, droop, and faint away : he will more particularly be our defence and
sup-

* Prov. iii. 24.

support. The light of his countenance will dispel every inward uneasiness, and open to the eyes of our faith a bright prospect into those regions of bliss and glory, where we shall no longer be teaz'd with pain, grief, or anxious Fears, but invested with a full possession of peace, joy, and happiness, world without end.

Amen !

S E R-

SERMON IV.

On TRUST in GOD.

PSALM lxxxiv. 13.

*O Lord God of hosts, blessed is the man that
putteth his trust in thee !*

IF we take an impartial survey of human nature, a small share of reflection will serve to convince us, how wretchedly insufficient it is for its own support: that it must, of necessity, have something from without itself to fix its confidence upon ; something to have recourse to, as a sure refuge, under the weight of present distress, or the apprehension of future.

Man, if we view him in the most favourable light, is a weak, dependent and defenceless being ! surrounded with evils,
which

which neither grandeur nor wealth can screen him from, and which all his boasted wisdom can neither foresee nor prevent! exposed to sicknesses and pains, which the strongest constitutions must submit to; and to the poison of malicious tongues, which innocence itself cannot always secure him from! confused with doubts and perplexities, which the utmost strength of genius cannot clear up; and alarm'd with terrors, which even the firmest natural courage is constrain'd to sink under!

In such a situation as this, we are forced to look out for some foreign aid, to supply these various and great deficiencies; to support the mind amidst all the changes and chances of this mortal life; to relieve our numerous infirmities, to dissipate our melancholy scruples, and to guard us from all the dangers that surround us.

No christian (one would hope) needs to be inform'd where to seek this support, nor where to find the proper object of his trust and confidence. Even natural reason will shew him how vain and de-

lusive

lusive all earthly and human supports are ; and direct his thoughts to that supreme Being who alone disposes all events ; whose kingdom is everlasting and power infinite ; whose tender mercies endure for ever ; and whose faithfulness and truth are a shield and buckler to all who firmly trust in him.

On him, therefore, we may securely fix our confidence, inwardly and perfectly assur'd that if we behave as dependent creatures, and obedient children, he will ever be our kind patron, our indulgent father.

As his knowledge comprehends all our wants, perplexities, and fears ; his power of relieving us is equal to his wisdom, and his gracious inclination equal to his power. Without whose aid the best-concerted schemes must drop to nothing ; and without whose permission no evil can come nigh our dwelling.

Instead, then, of trusting in the depth of our own wisdom, the multitude of riches, or the strength of our interest with those of our fellow-creatures, whom

we imagine capable of protecting, and willing to relieve us: instead of such precarious and shallow foundations of confidence, let us lift up our eyes unto the heavens, from whence cometh our only sure help. And let not the splendor of any thing that is great, nor the stability of any thing that is strong, nor yet the conceit of any thing that is good here below, withdraw our attention from that God who only is holy, who only is the Lord, who alone has power to save, and power to destroy.

Thus, in time of war, instead of reposing our chief confidence in fleets or armies; in the conduct of our leaders, or the courage of our troops; let our highest trust and hope be in that God "who alone is the giver of all victory, and whose power no creature is able to resist."

When struggling with the violence of a distemper, we must not principally confide either in the skilfulness of the physician, or the healing power of drugs and medi-

medicines ; but in that gracious omnipotent Being, “ who killeth and maketh alive ; who bringeth down and lifteth up ;” without whose blessing the most promising remedies will be vain, and the best-adapted prescriptions utterly ineffectual. When Aſa king of Judah was invaded by his enemies, he relied not on the Lord his God, but on the king of Syria, his powerful confederate ; and his impious indiscretion was punish’d accordingly. When afflicted with the gout, and his disease became exceeding great : “ yet, in his disease, he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians ; *” in them alone he trusted, was deceiv’d, and died !

Quite different were the sentiments and conduct of his predecessor David, who, conscious of the weakness and insufficiency of all human supports, piously asserts that “ no king can be sav’d by the multitude of an host, neither is any mighty man delivered by much strength : †”

whilst,

* 2 Chron. xvi. 12.

† Psalm xxxiii. 16.

whilst, therefore "some put their trust in
"chariots, and some in horses," * his re-
solution was to "remember the name, and
"rely upon the aid of the Lord his God."

Having thus far considered the object
of our confidence, the only true object:
let us next enquire into the nature of the
duty itself, and the conditions required on
our part, in order to justify our reliance on
the divine protection. And then consider
the happy state of that man whose hope
is thus placed.

As to the nature of this duty, if we
consider it with regard to a future state,
it implies a firm reliance on the mercy of
God, that (through the mediation of our
redeemer) he will forgive us all our sins,
and invest us with eternal happiness, if
we, on our part, perform those conditions,
pursue those paths, and cultivate those
virtues to which the promises of happi-
ness are annex'd. Otherwise, if we are
indolent and unactive; if we take no
pains to qualify ourselves for the divine

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favour;

* Ps. xx. 7.

favour; and yet feed the mind with the vain romantic hope of future bliss; our hope like that "of the hypocrite shall perish and be cut off, and our trust shall be as the spider's web!" *

If consider'd with regard to the present life; it implies an humble, devout, and firm trust in the divine assistance, protection, and relief, amidst all our dangers, distresses, wants, and fears; with a steadfast assurance, that the pious expectation will never disappoint us, if we, on our part, use all the proper means afforded us, and prudently apply those instruments, and second causes, which have a natural tendency to guard, support, relieve, and rescue us.

For, when reason and prudence point out the methods of safety and relief which the divine goodness puts into our hands, then to sit down, and expect to be preserved or relieved by a miracle: this deserves not the name of pious confidence; 'tis presumption, folly, and madness!

Thus,

* Job viii. 14.

Thus, when justly apprehensive of the approach of any disorder, our trust in God must not make us negligent or remiss in using such precautions, and applying such preventives as are most likely to preserve our health: and, when that inestimable blessing is really lost, 'tis certainly our duty to procure advice, and to submit to such directions as the physician shall think proper to prescribe: and, having done this, we must repose our confidence, not altogether in the means applied, but in that God, who alone can give them success, and make them conducive to the end propos'd.

Amidst that contagious and fatal distemper amongst the cattle, which has made such extensive havock in our land; whilst all the methods of prevention have been found unable to stop its progress, and all the methods of application too weak to subdue its virulence; one would imagine that all our confidence in human means alone should be quite suppress'd, and that now we should be constrain'd to look up to that God who sent this calamity as a

punishment for our sins, and in whom alone we can safely trust, either to be exempt from any future assaults, or to find success in any of those methods of cure we may think proper to apply.

In time of scarcity and drought; instead of anxiously observing the appearance of the skies, the temperature of the air, and the influence it has on the barometer, and thence drawing inferences of despair, omens of inevitable famine, and indulging an impious distrust in providence; we should deplore that national guilt which brought down the punishment; and then, with humble confidence, wait the good pleasure of that God, whose direction all natural causes (what we call natural causes) obsequiously pursue; who, when he sees proper (tho' contrary to the expectation, as well as the deserts of the murmuring and ungrateful) "will send us rain, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness; will again bring forth grass for the cattle, and green herb for the service of men *."

Should

* Psalm civ. 14.

Should we ever be reduc'd to a penurious state, we must not pretend to sit with arms across, as vainly expecting to be fed (like the Israelites) with food from heaven, or, as Elijah was in the wilderness; nor yet suffer our spirits to sink into despair, in the other extreme, much less have recourse to unlawful methods of relief; but strive to exert our industry, as well as we can, firmly trusting in that gracious omnipotent Being, who will crown our honest endeavours with suitable success, and "prosper the work of our hands upon us:" will strike out for us some comfortable subsistence, or incline the heart of some good-natur'd benefactor to relieve us, should we not be able (unless at the expence of our innocence) to relieve ourselves.

Should our character be, at any time, blacken'd with aspersions; should we fall under the odium of a credulous world, by having our conduct, or our principles maliciously represented; we must, in the first place, double our precaution, abstain from even the appearance of evil; confute their

censures by a spotless behaviour ; give no occasion of scandal to those who so industriously seek occasion ; but strive to vindicate our innocence “ in the spirit of “ meekness :” and then, let us “ commit “ our way unto the Lord, and put our trust “ in him, and he will bring it to pass ; will “ make our righteousness as clear as the “ light, and our just dealing as the noon- “ day.*”

If thus we duly perform our part, we cannot, under any event, yield to the intrusion of despair, without a crime ; a crime as great, and as fatal to us, as presumption would be in the opposite extreme : 'tis a kind of disclaiming the attributes of our Creator, particularly his goodness, veracity, and power ; as if he were either unwilling or unable to protect those whom he has promis'd never to fail nor forsake : and how monstrously inconsistent is it to distrust, in any respect, the providence of that God, from whom we have already received such continued instances of paternal

* Psalm xxxvii. 5, 6.

ternal care and affection ! whose goodness rais'd us from our original dust, and made us what we are ! whose power has hitherto sustain'd us, amidst the innumerable, perpetual dangers which our frail nature is expos'd to ! whose preserving care, were it, but for a single moment, withdrawn from us, we should immediately, without any visible cause, be "as the grass upon the house-top, which withers afore it be plucked up !" *

Justly then may we infer, with the Apostle, that he "who hath deliver'd us from so great dangers, and doth deliver ; in him we may securely trust that he will yet deliver ;" † will, in all the future scenes of life, if we persevere in our duty, continue his kind protection, and guard us from all evil.

"O Lord God of hosts, how blessed is the man who thus trusteth in thee" ! who amidst all contingencies and events, in a state so very subject to revolution as our present one is, never wants a strong stay,

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and

* Psalm cxxix. 6.

† 2 Cor. i. 10.

and rock of salvation ! who, amidst all the storms and tempests that may arise, has a sure refuge to flee unto, and be secure ! whose resolution no dangers can move, whose firm reliance no misfortunes can unhinge ! whose “ heart is stablished, and “ will not shrink, not even tho’ the earth “ should be mov’d, and the hills carried “ into the midst of the sea !

Is he threaten’d with the malice, rage and virulence of his fellow-creatures ? God is his hope and strength, whom then shall he fear ? God is his defence and shield, of what then shall he be afraid ? his trust is fix’d on one to whose power all creatures bow and obey ; who will either “ restrain “ the fierceness of their wrath, or cover “ him with the shadow of his wings, until “ their tyranny be overpast.”

When languishing on a bed of sickness, where all external comforts are nauseous and teasing, or, at best, insipid : his soul waits still upon God ; whilst, with inward satisfaction, he reflects, that the infliction he labours under is the infliction of an all-wise,

wise, all-gracious being, who corrects with the tenderness of an indulgent father; who, in his severest dispensations, has the happiness of his creatures still in view, and, when he sees proper, will either restore him to temporal ease, or invest him with eternal felicity.

Are his circumstances mean or necessitous? he knows that his condition is the allotment of his heavenly father, and consequently the fittest for him. Instead of trusting in man, or his precarious assistance, which is generally the most backward where it is most wanted, his reliance is fix'd on that God, with whom there is no respect of persons, and to whom earthly distinctions are no distinctions at all. To his will he calmly submits, and in his gracious providence he steadfastly confides; knowing this, that so dependent a being, as man is, must not pretend to carve for himself, but take whatever is given him, and be thankful: that the present life is only a short stage to another: that if he duly reaches his journey's end, no matter how

how he far'd in the way thither ; since the difficulties he met with on the road will only serve to heighten the pleasure of his arrival !

Is he deserted by his friends ? by those of whose sincerity he had entertain'd the highest opinion ? should adversity hide all his acquaintance out of his sight, whilst all their zealous professions of kindness dwindle into cold respect, or useless pity ! one friend, one benefactor he has still left, whose goodness, truth and love never fail : tho' even " his father and his mother should forsake him, the Lord will take him up ; * " will be his strong support here, and his exceeding great reward hereafter.

And lastly, when the hour of dissolution draweth near ; a time when all earthly supports are altogether weak and unavailing, and some sure support is more particularly wanted : when they who have plac'd their confidence in any thing below the divine nature, perceive, with unspeakable regret, their fatal error : he, whilst

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* Psalm xxvii. 12.

capable of reflecting, can with inward comfort reflect, and with inward pleasure feels, that he has not believ'd in vain, neither trusted in vain. Death, tho' arm'd with pain and anguish, cannot undermine his hope, nor shake his pious confidence: it brings with it none of those shocks and terrors which make it so dreadful and intolerable to those who, thoughtless of a future state, and bent on the pleasures and enjoyments of this world, their incomplete schemes, or hoarded wealth; leave, with strong reluctance, the present life, and start back, with agonizing dread, at the thoughts of another! whilst he, conscious of the vanity of all terrestrial views, and rejoicing in hope of that immensity of bliss which he is just upon the point of launching into; tho', perhaps, his body may be convuls'd and torn with agony, is yet inwardly serene, compos'd and chearful! regardless of what he suffers, his attention is fix'd on that God who was always his hope and strength, and who will

will not desert him in this his last and greatest distress, but will soothe all his anguish with the prospect of approaching joy; will protect him from all the powers of darkness, and receive him into those regions of peace, happiness, and glory, where (thro' the merits and mediation of his redeemer) he shall taste unsullied pleasures, and uninterrupted bliss, to all eternity!

Which peaceful, happy, and glorious end, that we may all of us ever keep in view, and strive to qualify ourselves for,

God grant!

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SERMON V.

ON GRATITUDE to GOD.

PSALM lxxxvi. 12.

*I will thank thee, O Lord my God, with all
my heart, and will praise thy name for
evermore.*

THE book of psalms (we may observe) is peculiarly enrich'd and enliven'd with devout and fervent strains of praise and thanksgiving. The royal author's heart was duly warm'd with a grateful sense of his Creator's mercies to him, and to all men. He seems all in raptures when expressing his own gratitude, or striving to excite that of others. "Praise
" the Lord, O my soul, and all that is
" within

“within me (all my faculties and powers)
 “praise his holy name.*” “O praise
 “the Lord with me, and let us magnify
 “his name together.†”

When he has enlarg’d upon the wisdom and goodness of God display’d in the works of nature, he thus concludes the sublime description: “I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; yea, whilst I have any being, I will sing praises to my God.‡” When he considers the surprizing structure and composition of the human body, (tho’ the science of anatomy was then very imperfect, if compared with later improvements) the result of his meditation is—“I will give thanks unto thee, O God, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. §”

When he has dwelt upon the kind interpositions of providence for the support and preservation of mankind, amidst the
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* Ps. ciii. 1.

† Ps. xxxiv. 3.

‡ Ps. civ. 33.

§ Ps. cxxxix. 13.

hardships and dangers we are surrounded with, by relieving our wants, and soothing our complaints: "O that men (says he) " would therefore praise the Lord for his " goodness, and declare the wonders that " he doth for the children of men!*" " That they would offer unto him the " sacrifice of thanksgiving, and tell out his " works with gladness!†" That they would not confine their gratitude to a private acknowledgment, but " exalt him " also in the congregation of the people.‡"

The psalmist, indeed, has on most occasions, at least, all remarkable incidents, left monuments of his own gratitude, and patterns for ours. And if one who had the safety and happiness of a whole nation entrusted to his care, could find frequent opportunities of paying his devout acknowledgments, even amidst the hurries of a court; and could praise his God " seven " times a day:" we sure may be thankful with the same frequency, as being most of

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* Ps. cvii. 8.

† ib. ver. 22.

‡ ib. ver. 32.

us less embarrass'd, and all of us excited by stronger inducements.

That the sense of this duty, therefore, may more deeply be imprest on our hearts; let us consider the nature of gratitude, in respect of our Creator; the numerous motives and obligations to it; together with the sublime pleasures and advantages annex'd to the due performance of so amiable a virtue.

Gratitude for favours receiv'd is always esteem'd an indispensable duty betwixt man and man. He who confers a favour, tho' of a temper so generous as to confer it on one who has not the least prospect of making an equivalent return, expects at least a grateful acknowledgment: this is in the power of every one to pay. And the wretch who disdains to make so cheap a retribution, not only excludes himself from all future favours, but is universally despis'd, abhorr'd and shun'd: and who can blame a man for discontinuing his kindnesses to one who is too regardless, perhaps too vain and haughty, to own himself oblig'd?

oblig'd? our Creator, indeed, still continues merciful, tho' we abuse his mercy; tho' we disregard his repeated favours, and (instead of paying him the tribute of praise, love and obedience, the natural product of a truly grateful heart) by an impious ingratitude affront and provoke him. But this reflexion, far from encouraging indolence and remissness, should still more strongly excite us to discharge a duty, which we have, hitherto, so monstrously and shamefully omitted.

Gratitude was plac'd in the first rank of virtues by the Heathens themselves. "I
 " would fain (says the most eloquent of
 " them) cultivate every virtue, not omitting
 " one: but more particularly would I strive
 " to be grateful, as well in reality as ap-
 " pearance. Gratitude is not only the
 " sublimest and loveliest virtue, but the
 " foundation and parent of all other virtues:
 " for what is religion, or the motive of
 " religious performances, but gratitude to
 " the supreme Being? What is filial duty,
 " but gratitude to our parents? And,
 G " whence

“ whence the generous warmth that glows
 “ in the patriot’s breast, but gratitude to
 “ his country? *” ’Tis, moreover, the
 life and soul of these social virtues, benevo-
 lence, friendship, love, and even justice
 itself; nor can they subsist without it.

And, to shew how strongly they detested
 the opposite vice, some nations, particularly
 the Persians and Spartans, made it ob-
 noxious to their laws, and annex’d a severe
 punishment to the guilt of it: thus striving
 to restrain and suppress so hateful a crime
 betwixt man and man.

But, how much more criminal is our
 ingratitude to that God, in whom we live,
 move, and have our being? to whose gra-
 cious bounty we are indebted for all the
 comforts, conveniences and necessaries of
 life; the health we enjoy, the food we eat,
 the breath we draw! These, indeed, are
 benefits impartially indulg’d to all mankind,
 to Jews, Turks, and Heathens. But, we
 Christians have yet sublimer motives to be
 thankful: a nobler theme demands our
 praise!

* Cicero.

praise! 'tis, indeed, our indispensable duty to offer the daily sacrifice of thanksgiving for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings which concern this present life: but more particularly, and above all, are we oblig'd to praise his holy name for his inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the various means of grace vouchsaf'd us here, and the lively hope of that glory we expect hereafter!

If, in return for all these instances of his unspeakable goodness, God had requir'd at our hands some laborious or expensive acknowledgment, would we not chearfully pay it? How much more then, when he only requires us to be thankful, and, from the consideration of the gift, to bless the giver!

And, if the sense of our Creator's mercies does not extort our praise, we prove ourselves more ungrateful than even irrational creatures: they entertain a lasting and intense fondness for those who have been kind to them, and, as well as they

can, express the sincerest gratitude to their generous benefactors.

Would we then strive to discharge this duty in a suitable manner, be it our care studiously to observe, daily to recollect, and joyfully to commemorate, the various instances of the divine goodness, vouchsaf'd to mankind in general, or to ourselves in particular. We must consider him as the author of every good we enjoy, whether with regard to our temporal or spiritual advantage. And, when we receive an obligation from any of our fellow creatures, let our gratitude always rise in proportion to the kindness; not striving (as the manner of some is) to disown, conceal, or extenuate the obligation, but retaining a due sense of the favour, ever ready to acknowledge, tho' unable to return it. But then we must remember that our gratitude is not to stop here, but that the ultimate praise is due to that God, who gives them both the power and the will to serve us.

And, to prove our sincerity, let this our gratitude be productive of suitable effects;
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of intense love for the source of all blessings; an ardent zeal for his glory; and an impartial obedience to his laws: ever striving to celebrate his praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by devoting ourselves to his service, and walking before "him" in holiness and righteousness all our "days:" piously presuming, that he who has already done so great things for us, and exerted his bounty in so many conspicuous instances, will continue forth his loving-kindness towards us, in the remaining scenes of life; which he certainly will, unless our ingratitude for past mercies disqualifies us to receive any future ones.

To a mind devoutly dispos'd, motives to this duty will arise from almost every occurrence in life: but some peculiar incidents and incentives there are, which it would be a crime to disregard.

Thus, when we are so happy as to subdue the violence of any temptation, or to rescue the heart from the tyranny of any habitual vice, the most fervent thanks must be address'd to that God, by whose gracious

assistance this conquest was obtain'd : and, by parity of reason, the same inference is to be drawn from the progress we make in any virtue.

When we have escap'd any imminent danger, 'tis needless, perhaps, to be reminded of our duty in this particular : the present sense of our deliverance, together with the remains of that terror which the danger inspir'd, will extort an acknowledgment to our kind preserver, and make us devout and grateful, in spite of the utmost indolence : but then we should always reflect, how many unseen dangers we are encompass'd with, and by the same gracious hand deliver'd from. Accordingly, at the close of every day, we must not fail to offer the sacrifice of praise, not only for all the blessings we have shar'd, but for our having been secur'd from all the hazards visible and invisible, temporal and spiritual, which constantly surround us !

In the morning, we should awake with the same disposition, and our first thoughts should be thoughts of gratitude to that
God,

God, whose power has been our shield and defence in that gloomy interval, and who graciously vouchsafes to take care of us, when we are incapable of consulting our own safety!

Whenever we sit down to meat, or rise from it, let our acknowledgments be duly paid to that propitious Being, who “openeth his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness.*” Conscious of our entire dependence—let us strive to display the sincerity of our gratitude, by the devout solemnity of our address: performing the ceremony, not in so languid and careless a manner, as if merely to avoid the shame of omitting it, nor with so slight and superficial an air, as if we were really ashamed of performing it; but so as to express a deep sense of his bounty, who daily prepares a table for us, and gives us both the appetite to eat, and the power to digest.

The ancient Heathens (to the reproach of many modern Christians be it said) were

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* Psalm cxly. 16.

religiously exact in this particular: not one of them (says their greatest poet, speaking of an entertainment) presum'd to taste the repast set before him, till he had offer'd a devout acknowledgment to Heaven for it: nor could they do this out of a vain notion that the deity wanted, or receiv'd any advantage from, such their libations, but merely to express their dependence, to display the divine bounty, and their own gratitude thence resulting.

When our spirits are rais'd by a flow of great or unexpected success, our hearts will naturally be dilated with sentiments of gratitude, it would be pain and grief to suppress them: the only caution to be observ'd in this case is, to direct those sentiments to their proper object, even to that God who is the source of all the blessings we enjoy, by whatsoever instruments, and thro' whatsoever channels, they may be convey'd to us. But then we must remember too—that 'tis our duty to be thankful, not only for prosperous and pleasing events,

events, but for those of a quite different nature.

Disappointments, losses, afflictions, and diseases, how harsh and disagreeable soever they may appear in themselves, are, perhaps, more distinguishing symptoms of the divine favour than a constant, uninterrupted flow of prosperity and health. However, this we know, that they are the inflictions of a kind, indulgent God, and, consequently, calculated for our advantage; calculated to improve our sublimest interest, by a method kind, tho' severe; to regulate and subdue those inordinate and restless passions, which break in upon our temporal happiness, and endanger our eternal; to wean our affections from this vain world, and to fix them on a better; to punish us in this life, that we may not be punish'd in the next; and that, by calmly and chearfully enduring a transient pain, we may be qualified to share eternal pleasure.

As these are the gracious motives of our heavenly Father's correction, let fretfulness and impatience give way to gratitude,
and

and let us learn, not only to bear the stroke, but to adore and bless the hand that strikes!

When restor'd to our former ease and health, let us pay our humble and devout acknowledgments to the power that restor'd us, not only in our private devotions, but, as soon as our constitution will give us leave, "let us go into his gates with thanksgiving, "and into his courts with praise, be "thankful unto him, and speak good of "his name," as for all his former benefits, so particularly, for his late mercies vouchsaf'd unto us.

Men of a narrow and selfish way of thinking, may, perhaps, imagine that they have fully discharg'd this duty, when thankful to Providence for the blessings which they themselves receive. National blessings, indeed, may excite their gratitude, as inclusive of their own interest, what every particular member has a share in, and feels the influence of: but, certainly, 'tis our duty to celebrate the divine goodness for blessings confer'd on any of our fellow-creatures,

creatures, tho' such as we ourselves are entirely unconcern'd in.

Whenever we contemplate the works of nature, and trace the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, display'd in all the various parts of the creation, and farther reflect, that all this ample scene is made subservient to our use, convenience, and pleasure; it must needs excite our warmest adoration and praise to that God, whose goodness has plac'd us in so high a rank, and given us this dominion over the works of his hands!

'Tis one of the odious properties of the opposite vice, to make a single refusal cancel the memory of all past obligations, tho' never so numerous, when, perhaps, he who refuses cannot possibly comply without the utmost inconvenience. This, betwixt man and man, is universally esteem'd disingenuous and fordid to the last degree: but this is every one guilty of, towards his God, who, regardless of all the innumerable and inestimable benefits hitherto confer'd

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on him, murmurs at the condition of life which his Creator has thought properest for him; is still uneasy and dissatisfied, for not being indulg'd in all the fond desires which ingratitude forms, and vanity foment, and which God, out of mere mercy, refuses to gratify. But let us learn to cherish sentiments of gratitude for all that we have hitherto enjoy'd, and all that we now enjoy; thankful for even the minutest favours, as conscious of our own unworthiness to receive any at all.

Considering farther, that to celebrate our Creator's praise is, at once, the most honourable and the most agreeable employment of those powers and faculties, which God has enrich'd our nature with, as being the chief end of our creation, both with regard to this life, and the next.

And whilst our other acts of devotion are founded on imperfection, depravity, contrition, and sympathetic pain, the sprightly exercise of praise and thanksgiving is free from all unpleasing mixtures and

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allays: 'tis the voice of joy and gladness, the overflowings of a heart that glows with gratitude to a beneficent Being, whose compassions and mercies fail not! And, as it flows from a compos'd and chearful heart, so it sanctifies and improves that chearfulness from whence it sprung: excites the remembrance of past mercies, heightens the pleasure of present enjoyments, and cheers the mind with the hope and prospect of future ones, far greater than those we have already receiv'd, or, in the present life, are capable of receiving.

A duty, enforc'd with such various and strong motives, let us ever be willing to discharge with the utmost sincerity and devotion.

Amidst all the changes and chances of this mortal life, where "all things," and all events, "work together for good, to them that love God*:" whether sooth'd with success, or cross'd with disappointment; surrounded with affluence,

or

* Rom. viii. 28.

or straiten'd with penurious circumstances; exalted to a lofty state, or fix'd in an humble situation; blooming in health, or pining under sickness and pain: let our hearts be still prepar'd to offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving, to praise and magnify the name of that God, whose mercies are over all his works, and shine forth in all his dispensations.

As this, at all times, in all places, and upon all occasions, is meet, right, and our bounden duty, so more particularly in our approaches to the sacred altar: our praise and thanksgiving should then be address'd with a peculiar fervency and zeal, when we celebrate that endearing memorial of our Creator's mercy, of our Redeemer's love!

With thoughts abstracted from all the vain and noisy scenes of this world, let us direct our attention to nobler objects, and lift up our hearts unto the Lord; humbly receiving the representation of our Redeemer's body, and feeding on him

him in our hearts by faith, with thanksgiving!

Receiving too, with the same grateful disposition, the representation of his blood, with a thankful remembrance, that his real blood was shed for us undeserving sinners!

To praise, to bless, to worship, to glorify our God, in this so solemn and devout a manner, and in concert and communion with our fellow-christians, is, at once, the greatest honour, and the greatest happiness too, our present state admits of. By this we anticipate, as it were, here below, that glorious employment, which we all hope, thro' the merits of our Redeemer, to be engag'd in hereafter, to all eternity.

When, with angels, and archangels, and all the company of heaven, it will be our constant and rapturous employment, to laud and magnify thy glorious name, O God; evermore praising thee, and saying, holy, holy, holy Lord

God of hosts, heaven and earth are full
of thy glory; glory be to thee, O God
most high!

Even to thee be ascrib'd, as is most
due, all honour, glory, praise, &c. both
now and ever,

Amen!

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S E R M O N VI.

On our LORD'S TEMPTATION.

MATT. iv. 1.

Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.

THE Evangelist, at the close of the preceding chapter, gives us a description of our Lord's baptism in Jordan, by the hands of St. John, and of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him, as soon as that ceremony was perform'd.

Immediately after his baptism, that spirit, which then descended on him, leads him now into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil. In that barren solitude he

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miraculously fasted forty days, and forty nights; at the expiration of which, the necessities and appetites of his nature, consider'd as man, came upon him, and he hungred. The tempter, thinking to take advantage of this infirmity in his human nature, (for his divine nature at this time, as well as at his future agony and crucifixion, lay dormant, as it were, did not exert itself :) The tempter, fond of so fair an opportunity, when the cravings of nature (he thought) would second his attempt; puts him upon manifesting his divinity, by turning stones into bread: our Lord answer'd, That there was no necessity for the interposition of a miracle to satisfy his hunger, since it was written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God : *" intimating, that the servants of God should still rely upon his gracious and sure promises of relief, even tho' the usual and ordinary means of their subsistence be, for the present, cut off;

* Deut. viii. 3.

off; that they should never presume to apply any indirect methods to supply their wants; but exert their patience and resignation, and wait the leisure of divine providence.

Disappointed in this attempt, he tries another artifice: conveys him to Jerusalem, and sets him on a pinnacle of the temple, with a challenge to prove himself the son of God, by casting himself down. And perceiving that our Lord had recourse to holy scripture, he too quotes a passage out of the Psalms, which seem'd to assure him of protection and safety: "He shall give his angels charge, &c. *" To this our Lord retorts another quotation, † forbidding us to tempt our creator by needless and presumptuous trials of his providential care.

As this delusion would not take; he forms his last assault upon the score of ambition. Ambition is a vice of a most insinuating nature; a vice, which the most firm and generous minds have frequently

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been

* Psalm xci. 11.

† Deut. vi. 16.

been ensnar'd with ; even those that have been superior to all other vices. Besides, thro' this the devil himself fell ; by this he ruined our first parents ; and by this, as his last reserve, he probably hop'd to have prevented the world's redemption.

Accordingly, he moves him to an exceeding high mountain ; represents to him all the glory and splendor of the world, rang'd in one gay landscape ; and pretending that the power of disposal was vested in himself, proffers the whole as a reward, if he would only fall down and worship him. This proposal, which included so audacious an encroachment on the divine honour, our Lord rejects with disdain and indignation ; saying, " Get thee behind me, Satan, for " it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord " thy God, and him only shalt thou " serve."

The devil, thus baffled and defeated in all his attempts, left him ; and " angels " came and ministred unto him : " viz. waited on him, and supplied him with necessities.

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As there is no one incident of our Saviour's life but what is calculated for our imitation, at least, for our instruction:

And as this holy season * is peculiarly set apart to commemorate his fasting and temptation: let our present thoughts be engaged in considering the circumstances of that remarkable incident, together with the various inferences and instructions thence arising.

I. Let us consider the time when our Lord was thus tempted.

'Tis the foundation of uneasy and melancholy thoughts in many religious and sincere christians, to find themselves pursued with temptations even to the altar; that the tempter should be permitted to assault them amidst the most solemn exercises of devotion: that wandering thoughts and vain suggestions should then intrude on their minds, when they are more particularly zealous to fix their attention on spiritual objects, and those sacred duties they are engag'd in: that when they have

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* Lept.

been striving to sanctify their minds by fervent prayer, or have even been devout partakers of the holy communion ; the same temptations should still return upon them with equal, perhaps, with greater violence !

But let them, to their comfort, reflect, that their redeemer himself was tempted in like manner : that immediately after his baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended on him, and a voice from heaven declar'd him the beloved Son of God ; immediately after this he was tempted.

Whence we may learn, that no exercises of devotion, no degree of virtue and piety can set us beyond the reach of temptation : that, on the contrary, the more industrious we are in the pursuit of our duty, the more strongly shall we be tempted to disregard it. The busy malice of the tempter will certainly be proportion'd to the resistance we make. He will naturally be more solicitous to bring us into captivity, when we are most zealous to assert our freedom. If the vicious and
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abandon'd part of mankind are strangers to all uneasinesses and trials of this nature ; if they can throw off all correspondence with heaven, and incur the guilt of gross immorality, and yet not feel the slightest pang of conscience ; the reason is obvious and self-evident. They already are his slaves, his passive slaves ; and to alarm them would be inconsistent with the tempter's policy ; would weaken and destroy his own power. To lull their consciences into a perpetual slumber ; to divert (as far as he can) every uneasy reflection, every thing that may inspire a sense of their danger ; is plainly the most effectual method to keep them from repentance, and to preserve his dominion over them.

As therefore all assaults of this kind are peculiar to those whose hearts are well inclin'd, (tho' the devil strives to make them think otherwise of themselves) consequently, instead of indulging thoughts of despair, we should consider it as the common lot of all who anxiously strive to do their duty. And the proper use to be

made of such repeated temptations—is to alarm our vigilance, and keep us on our guard ; inducing us to curb all impious, impure, and even unsettled thoughts, and to suppress them in their birth ; humbly imploring the aid of that God who, tho', for wise and good ends, he suffers his devout servants to be thus tempted, “ will “ not suffer us to be tempted above that “ we are able, but will with the tempta- “ tion also make a way to escape, that we “ may be able to bear it. *”

As thus we must not expect that the most habitual practice of piety and devotion will exempt us from temptation : so if, in the next place,

2. We consider the scene of this incident—a lonely and unfrequented wilderness ; it will serve to convince us, that solitude itself will not exclude the tempter's intrusion.

To retire from the noise and hurry of conversation and business, in order to commune with our own heart ; to search into our spiritual condition ; and to devote our thoughts to the concerns of eternity ;

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* 1 Cor. x. 13.

to do this as frequently as convenience will permit, is a point of prudence, and of duty. But hither also will the tempter pursue us ; will strive (and with too much success) to interrupt the train of our pious meditations, and divert our thoughts to sensual objects !

Tho' retirement may exclude the temptations that arise from our fellow-creatures ; those of the devil, and our own depraved appetites are still at hand ; a deplorable variety of irregular imaginations will croud in upon the mind, tho' we are never so cautious to prevent them.

How strictly, therefore, should we at all times, and in all places, be upon our guard ; conscious of the frailty and sinfulness of our own nature, and the restless industry and malice of our spiritual adversary !

If, again, we consider the various artifices which the tempter employ'd, with a view of seducing our Lord ; it will serve to instruct us, in what manner he spreads the net for our feet : that he strives to
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take advantage of our wants and necessities; our unguarded hours; the peculiar foibles of our several constitutions and tempers; our predominant passions, and favourite objects: that from hence he endeavours (with artful insinuation) to raise impure ideas, and criminal inclinations; and to lead us on, by gentle and unperceiv'd degrees, to the guilt of actual sin: striving to persuade us, at first, that we may safely advance thus or thus far; that there can be no harm in such or such indulgences, (mere innocent freedoms!) till at last our passions are grown too headstrong to be restrained, and we are gone too far to make a safe retreat!

Thus observing the distress which our Lord was reduc'd to, for want of food; and imagining that the eagerness of appetite would favour the delusion, he tempts him to satisfy his hunger by a miracle seemingly innocent; tho' under the disguise of thus innocently refreshing nature, the crime of distrusting God's favour as well as providence lay artfully concealed.

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This disguise our blessed Saviour immediately saw thro', and disdain'd the proposal. But how many of those who profess themselves his disciples, fall by the same snare! whilst their circumstances are smooth and easy, they too are easy and resign'd. But when necessity and distress come upon them; they either sink into melancholy and despair, and imagine themselves forsaken of their God; or growing impatient under his afflicting hand, and not caring to wait the good leisure of his providence, have recourse to unlawful methods of relief, and rashly presume to help themselves, tho' at the expence of their own innocence, and their neighbour's property; and when they have done this, make their necessity their excuse.

The devil finding our Lord's reliance on God so firmly fix'd, immediately tempts him to carry that reliance to an undue height, by making a needless and presumptuous trial of his power and protection. The same train of artillery he still employs against those who fight under Christ's banner.

banner. He first tempts us to leave the paths of innocence, and to violate our duty. If, thro' the grace of God, we have the resolution to baffle this attempt ; he next endeavours to inspire the unguarded heart with spiritual pride, and makes even our virtue our temptation : prompting us to exalt ourselves upon the vain notion of our own piety ; to make a merit of every instance of self-denial, and an occasion too to censure and despise those who, perhaps, take greater freedoms. This too plainly discovers itself in a modern set of enthusiasts, who, tho', perhaps, they may practise some duties in a stricter and more regular manner than some of their neighbours, incur the guilt of breaking in upon charity, as well as humility ; since, not content with esteeming themselves the peculiar favourites of heaven, they pass the severe sentence of damnation upon all who refuse to follow, or be led by them.

The last snare which the tempter spread, tho' gilded with all the allurements of grandeur and power, our Lord rejects with
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scorn and resentment. Happy would it be, if all who profess his doctrine, were equally deaf to all proposals of this nature, tho' in a much lower degree ! if they would never prostitute their religion for sordid gain, nor sacrifice their eternal happiness to their temporal interest ! if they would duly consider the value of their immortal souls ; and how wretched their acquisition would prove, were they to gain all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, if they must previously fall down, and worship the devil !

Thus was the son of God tempted for our instruction ; and thus did he triumph over all the strength of temptation for our encouragement. As he was thus made sensible of the tempter's malice to mankind, and the painful conflicts which our frail nature is constantly expos'd to : so does he retain a sympathetic sense of our infirmities, and a willingness to support and relieve all his faithful servants, when surrounded with difficulties of this nature.

“ We have not an high priest (says the

“apostle) who cannot be touched (or affected) with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*” The tempter’s assaults did not in the least violate or stain his innocence, nor (if we strenuously resist them) will they stain ours. Unless our depraved hearts keep a secret correspondence with the enemy; unless we betray ourselves; all the crafts or assaults of the devil can make no impression. “Cast thyself down” was the tempter’s address to our Saviour, without offering to use any sort of compulsion or violence to him. Whence we may infer, that his power is limited, and that, without our own concurrence, he cannot hurt us. Temptations are so far from being evil in themselves, that, if made a proper use of, they become the instruments of exercising, improving, and perfecting our virtue, and serve to establish and confirm what they were intended to subvert. In short, all the merit which our virtue can boast,

* Heb. iv. 15.

boast, is founded on temptation. We can never truly deserve the character of being either sober, just, or chaste, unless we have been tempted to be otherwise. But when, in opposition to the propensities of nature, the eagerness of desire, the allurements of opportunity, interest, and example, those destructive engines of our spiritual adversary; if, when thus assaulted, we retain our innocence: then, and only then, we become justly entitled to the shining characters abovementioned.

If, lastly, we consider the method which our Saviour took in subduing and silencing the tempter; we shall thence be informed where our chief and safest defence lies, whenever he assaults us: that, in imitation of the pattern here set before us, we should always have recourse to the sacred authority and word of God: that we steadfastly adhere to the unerring rule of our duty, as 'tis plainly describ'd to us in holy writ, and turn neither to the right hand nor to the left. This, amidst all our struggles and perplexities, will at once be

our refuge and our guide. This will dissipate all scruples with regard to the limits of our duty, when the tempter endeavours to represent it lighter than it is, in order to seduce us into guilt ; or to represent it heavier than it is, in order to drive us to despair. Where the inestimable promises annex'd to our obedience infinitely exceed all his alluring proffers, even tho' he had the power to make them good. Where the dreadful menaces annex'd to our disobedience infinitely overbalance the severest pains or terrors which he can threaten to inflict. And lest, thro' a despairing sense of our own weakness, our spirits should droop in the day of trial, the strong assurances of spiritual aid, which the scriptures give, will teach us to surmount all the discouragements and obstructions which he can alarm us with.

This then is "a strong hold, whereunto
"we may alway resort." The devil will
ever strive to deceive us : thro' ignorance,
inattention, or depravity of heart, we
may

may deceive ourselves: but God (we know) can neither deceive, nor be deceived.

How prudent, therefore, and even necessary is it, first, to consider the peculiar propensities of our nature; the bias of our warmer inclinations; the passion we find hardest to be subdued; the temptations which our situation or employment in life chiefly expose us to; the infirmities peculiar to our age, temper or constitution; and, when we have considered these circumstances, then to treasure up in our memory such passages in holy scripture as are more particularly applicable to our own case; that so we may neither thro' ignorance, thoughtlessness or surprize, be seduc'd from the way wherein we should go; that we may thus carry about us such plain directions for our feet, that (thro' the grace of God) our footsteps may neither go astray, nor slide.

Then shall our spiritual enemy have no advantage against us, nor the wicked one approach to hurt us.

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Then, to our unspeakable comfort, shall we find, that to subdue and triumph over the power of temptation, will produce a more intense, as well as a more exalted and lasting pleasure, than the indulgence could possibly impart. When, instead of that insupportable load of shame, regret and terror, which perpetually oppresses and overwhelms the guilty mind, we shall enjoy the blissful serenity of a good conscience, an inward and sincere joy, such as the world, with all its vain splendors, cannot give, and which all its afflictions cannot take away.

If thus we fortify, and thus exert ourselves, that God, in whom we trust, will, amidst all our conflicts, send down his Holy Spirit to support our weakness, and his holy angels to guard and protect us. "Will guide us with his counsel, and "after that receive us into glory.*" Will more than recompence all our pains and struggles here below, with the bright and sublime

* Psalm xxliii.

sublime reward of unfading happiness in
the world to come.

That we may all of us thus reject the
allurements of temptation, thus triumph,
and thus be crown'd,

*God, of his infinite Mercy, grant,
thro' Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom, &c.*

SERMON VII.

On the Nature and Employment
of the HOLY ANGELS.

PSALM civ. 4.

He maketh his Angels Spirits.

THAT there is an order of Beings plac'd in a kind of intermediate state betwixt God and man; of a nature superior to ours, not only in dignity and rank, but in holiness, wisdom and power; beings of a spiritual and immortal nature, obediently ministring to God, and employ'd by him to minister unto us — is a truth which no Christian was ever known to dispute. 'Tis so frequently and so plainly reveal'd to us in the scriptures, that
who-

whoever is, in the least, conversant with those sacred pages, must firmly be convinc'd of their existence.

'Tis, indeed, somewhat more than probable from reason itself, exclusive of revelation. For we can never be so vain as to imagine, that so infirm a creature as man should be plac'd at the head of the whole creation, or that in the scale of beings (as some writers term it) our frail nature should be the most perfect, and the most sublime.

If we consider all the various parts of the creation which this our earth contains, we shall find a close connexion betwixt those parts, and a gradual ascent from the lowest up to the highest.

Thus, some have only a bare existence, void of the least degree of life; such as the elementary parts of the world, earth, air, fire, water.

Just separated from these are those beings which, in some measure partake of life, (what we call vegetable life) since they receive nourishment, and grow, spread and

flourish, tho' entirely void of sense and perception; as flowers, herbs, plants, trees.

Next to these are beasts, which are endued, not only with life, but sense and perception too, and some faint resemblance of reason, which we are pleas'd to call instinct.

Nearly allied to these, at least in one part of his composition, his corporeal part, is Man, the noblest being in this lower world: and he, besides life and perception, which are common to brutes, is distinguish'd and adorn'd with the additional gifts of reason and speech, with a thinking and immortal soul.

And reason sure will direct us to continue the scale, and teach us to infer, That there must be an order of beings still higher than we, of a more pure and exalted nature, and free from those incumbrances which we, at present, labour under, and, consequently, better qualified to adore and glorify the beneficent Creator of the universe. For, since this earth is inhabited and fill'd
with

with beings adapted to it; how strangely absurd would it be to imagine that the regions above should be destitute of inhabitants; that they should not be peopled with beings of a superior class, who may enjoy the glories of those happy mansions, and pay perpetual homage, adoration and praise to that God, who there has fix'd his more immediate residence!

So natural indeed is this inference, and so obvious to human apprehension, that the Heathens themselves, tho' directed only by the light of unassisted reason, universally own'd the existence of certain beings, which, tho' call'd by different names, answer'd exactly to those which we call angels, both in respect of their nature and employment, particularly their watchful guardianship of the sons of men.

Thus much of the existence of angels. As to their nature; the Psalmist here informs us that it is spiritual; and, consequently, free from all indisposition, infirmity, fatigue; from pain, sickness and death: in short, from all the inconveniences which

attend these gross bodies which we frail mortals are invested with.

We are elsewhere told, "that they excel in strength *;" that is, they are more active, vigorous and powerful, than any other branch of the creation.

That they are invisible we know by experience. Formerly, indeed, there were many instances of their appearing under visible forms, which they occasionally assumed in revealing the will of God to mankind. But, since the Redeemer of the world condescended to take our nature upon him, in order to give us the last and most perfect declaration of his Father's will, the visible appearance of these celestial messengers has, for the most part, especially since the time of the Apostles, been laid aside, as now no longer necessary.

But, let not their invisibility be any argument against their existence, or even their attendance upon us mortals. At this rate, we may call in question the existence and

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* Psalm ciii. 20.

operation of the Holy Spirit, and, indeed, of our own souls.

Thus far the holy scriptures inform us concerning the nature of these heavenly beings. Here then let us rest contented; nor be ambitiously and presumptuously curious to search out what is beyond the power of our limited and imperfect capacities to reach or comprehend. "For
" hardly (says the author of the book of
" Wisdom) do we guess aright at things
" that are on earth, and with labour do
" we find the things that are before us
" (the most obvious parts of the creation)
" but the things which are in Heaven who
" has searched out?*"

Proceed we, therefore, to take a view of the office of these blessed spirits; the end of their creation; and their constant, unwearied employment, both with regard to God and ourselves.

With regard to God, we are assur'd,
That they perpetually surround his throne,
and celebrate his praise. To thee, O God,
all

* Wisdom ix. 16.

all Angels cry aloud ; the Heavens, and all the powers therein : To thee—the most exalted ranks of those celestial beings, even the Cherubin and Seraphin continually do cry, holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth, that is, Lord God of hosts or armies, meaning the innumerable companies of those happy spirits which are the subject of this discourse.

Another branch of their office with regard to their Creator, is to receive his sacred commands, and swiftly and impartially to put them in execution. And thus are they made the instruments and ministers of Divine Providence, in directing and governing the affairs of these lower regions. And this certainly is not only their employment, but their pleasure and happiness too : for their happiness must be the only motive to an all-knowing and all-powerful God thus to employ them, since he wants no assistances, being all-sufficient in himself.

Which leads me to consider, in the next place, their office with regard to man. 'Tis from this office that the angels derive their name,

name. The word [Angel] originally signifies a messenger; implying, that they are delegated by the Almighty to his faithful servants, to all who are thought worthy of their guidance and protection. And, in allusion to this, St. Paul says, "Are they
" not all (even the highest of them) ministring spirits, sent forth to minister for
" them (in behalf, and for the interests
" of them) who shall be heirs of salvation? *"

And as the ministry of angels is employ'd in promoting both our present and future happiness, let us separately enquire in what manner they exert their kind assistance with regard to both.

And in order to secure our innocence, to keep us stedfast and unbias'd in the right way, in the paths that lead to life eternal, these blessed spirits are employ'd in exciting pious, devout, and chaste thoughts, and in repelling those of an opposite nature, suggested by spirits of an opposite disposition.

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* Heb. i. 14.

The inspiration of good thoughts flows, indeed, originally from the Holy Spirit of God. It is, therefore, in subordination only to that divine Spirit, that the angels exert this power: and that they do exert it, and industriously too, there is scarce the least room to doubt.

That evil spirits are industrious in suggesting evil thoughts, we are too well assur'd. Thus, Satan is said to have "put
• "it into the heart*" of Judas to betray his Master, and to have fill'd the heart of Ananias "to lie to the Holy Ghost.†" And why should we imagine that the good angels are less assiduous in suggesting good thoughts, than the evil angels are in suggesting evil ones? Or that they are less solicitous to promote our salvation, than the others are to work our ruin? To suppose them not to be invested with equal power, were to derogate from the Divine Goodness; and to distrust their inclination, were not only disingenuous, but inconsistent.

Thus

* John xiii. 12.

† Acts v. 3.

Thus watchful and diligent are the holy angels to prevent our falling into sin, by guarding the mind, both against the open assaults, and treacherous insinuations of our ghostly enemies.

And when we are once betray'd or seduc'd; when in spite of their kind endeavours, in opposition to the dictates of reason, religion, and the Holy Spirit of God, we have sacrific'd, at once, our innocence and our happiness to the allurements of the Tempter, no less diligent may we suppose these careful guardians to be in striving to recal us; in alarming our consciences; in making us deeply sensible of our guilt, in order to make us deeply contrite for it. For we may well imagine that they are no less studious to promote our repentance, than pleas'd to see it brought to an happy event; and that their solicitude to have us repent, is proportionate to that joy which (as our blessed Lord informs us) the repentance of one sinner gives them.

We

We are further assur'd, that these holy spirits are more particularly present at our religious assemblies, and all the solemn exercises of our devotion. And the reason why they are so (we may well conjecture) is to watch over our indispositions and wandering thoughts, and to assist us in removing those, and restraining these; to fix our attention on the duty we are performing, and to raise the soul to a proper pitch of warmth and zeal: and, in the next place, to present and recommend our prayers at the throne of grace; not in a mediatorial sense (as the church of Rome fondly imagines) for there is but one Mediator betwixt God and man, the Man Christ Jesus; but as faithful observers, employ'd by an all-knowing God to be witnesses of our conduct here, as those who are to be witnesses of our final sentence hereafter: that so, in that most awful and solemn day, the day of judgment, they may be qualified to vindicate the sincerity of our obedience, and to confront that inveterate enemy of
our

our souls, the grand "Accuser of the
"brethren.*"

Having thus consider'd how the holy
angels are employ'd in promoting our spi-
ritual interest; let us now enquire how they
promote our temporal.

And this they do by "keeping us in all
"our ways;" by bearing us in their
hands, as it were; directing us amidst per-
plexity; administering secret comfort amidst
affliction; and guarding us from innu-
merable unseen dangers, which our present
infirm state is constantly expos'd to. "The
"Angel of the Lord (says the Psalmist)
"encampeth around them that fear him,
"and delivereth them. †"

And to the kind insinuations of these our
spiritual attendants we may rationally ascribe
those inward suggestions, those strong im-
pressions on the mind, forewarning us that
such or such an attempt will prove ha-
zardous or unfortunate, tho' we can give no
sort of reason why we are so persuaded.
And again, that such or such an under-
taking

* Rev. xii. 10.

† Ps. xxxiv. 7.

taking will be happy and successful, tho' we have scarce a bare probability to ground our hopes upon. And how many unexpected advantages have many of us shar'd; how many unforeseen dangers have we escap'd, by warnings of this kind, by those inward persuasions, that instinct, as it were, and impresson on our minds, which, how groundless soever it might seem, at first, yet the event has convinc'd us to have been something more than common, something more than natural. And this we certainly may best impute to the kind interposition of these ministring spirits, appointed by a gracious God to watch over us, both for our temporal and eternal good.

Thus diligent are the holy angels in guiding us thro' the various scenes of this life, and thus studious to prepare us for that blisful state which they themselves enjoy!

And equally assiduous, if possible, more assiduous may we suppose them to be at the hour of death, in assisting us to support those

those last and greatest agonies ; in soothing our anguish with the prospect of ensuing bliss ; in taking our departed spirits into their protection (as they did that of Lazarus *) and conveying them safely to the regions of eternal happiness.

For these vouchsafements of their aid, and watchful protection, our ultimate thanks are due to that God who gives them both the power and commission to exert it. But then, common gratitude demands some share of our regard for these his sacred emissaries, these instruments and dispensers of his goodness towards us.

The holy Angels ought certainly to be lov'd, rever'd, and honour'd ; but by no means be worship'd or ador'd ; since this would be (with the idolatrous church of Rome) to transfer to a created being the honour due to the Creator only.

At present, indeed, their nature is greatly superior to ours : but still they are creatures as well as we ; they are all, even the most exalted of them, ministering spi-

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rits,

* Luke xvi. 22.

rits, and fellow-servants of the same Lord. And tho', in our present imperfect state, we are so much inferior to them ; yet, we hope (thro' the merits of our redeemer) to be, one day, as great, as glorious, and as pure, as happy, unchangeable and immortal as they are now. *

To sum up the whole, therefore, with such meditations and inferences as naturally arise, or may properly be deduc'd, from this doctrine,

1. Let it serve to improve and heighten our ideas of the Supreme Being, and inspire an humble and awful dread of his majesty, more particularly amidst our addresses to him ; when we consider him perpetually surrounded with ten thousand times ten thousand beings of so splendid and sublime a nature !

2. Let it raise our confidence, and confirm our pious trust in the paternal love and protection of our God, when we call to mind that he is perpetually employing these

* Luke xx. 36.

these faithful vigilant spirits both for our present aid, and future happiness.

3. Let it give strength and life to our resolution and courage amidst all our struggles with the powers of darkness, when we recollect, what powerful auxiliaries we are supported with ; who are both as able and as willing to do us good, and to promote our salvation, as the evil angels are to seduce and ruin us.

And whenever the force of temptation becomes violent ; when our passions are work'd up to an inordinate height, and we are just at the point of yielding to the fatal delusion : let us then take one moment's pause, and reflect within ourselves, what deep concern it will give to these our celestial guardians, and what malicious triumph to the devil and his angels, to see us vanquish'd and undone : let us but think on this, and if we have any gratitude on one hand, or resentment on the other, this consideration alone ('tis to be hop'd) will restrain the eagerness of our

vicious desires, and baffle the attempts of our spiritual adversary.

4. And as we are sensible, that these our watchful attendants are ever present at our religious assemblies; that they are even now, at this time, and in this sacred place, inspecting our behaviour, the attention of our minds, and the fervency of our devotions: let us ever take care that our behaviour, attention, and fervency be such as may be approv'd by them, and accepted by our God.

5. And when we reflect—with what unwearied assiduity these happy spirits obey their creator's will; with what cheerfulness they fulfil his commandments, and hearken to the voice of his words: let it excite in us a pious ambition to imitate this their sprightly obedience; and as we daily pray, so let us daily endeavour too, that thy will, O God, may be done in earth (as far as our present imperfections will admit) with the same readiness,

diness, constancy, and pleasure, as it is in heaven, by the holy Angels!

And when we consider their kind, good-natur'd condescension to us, tho' beings of a lower class: let this induce us to be as ready in condescending to those of our own species, whom providence has plac'd in a station beneath ours; to be ever willing to soften their distress, and relieve their necessities, to the utmost of our power.

And, lastly, let us offer up our humble and sincere praises to almighty God, as for all the gracious dispensations of his providence, so in particular for the invisible assistance and protection of these ministering spirits: fervently entreating him to grant—that as his holy Angels alway do him service in heaven, so they may ever succour and defend us on earth; may guide us thro' all the hazardous scenes of life; attend and support us in the hour of death; and waft our souls to those blissful mansions

of peace, joy and glory, where, with angels, and archangels, and all the company of heaven, we may laud and magnify his glorious name to all eternity !

Amen.

S E R-

S E R M O N VIII.

On our LORD'S NATIVITY.

LUKE ii. 13, 14.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.

AS the last discourse was employ'd in considering the nature and designation of the holy Angels: let us now consider their remarkable behaviour at that great event, upon which is founded the redemption of mankind; viz. the incarnation of the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world.

We are inform'd, in the book of Job, * that when this visible world was created ; when the first foundations of the earth were laid ; “ all the sons of God (meaning the holy angels) shouted for joy.” These kind, benevolent beings express'd, not merely a calm satisfaction, but a glowing, congratulative transport, at seeing so large a diffusion of the divine goodness, tho' it extended not to them ; tho' it gave no sort of addition to their own happiness, except the pleasing sensation which generous spirits feel at seeing the success or advancement of others, when they themselves have no share in it.

Thus the holy angels with pleasure saw this beauteous world form'd, tho' form'd for man, a creature of a different species ; with pleasure they saw the blissful state in which his creator originally placed him. And proportionately great may we suppose their concern and grief to be, when they saw him forfeit his innocence ; and, with his innocence, his happiness : when they

* Job xxxviii. 7.

they saw him (in punishment for his presumptuous disobedience) reduc'd to a melancholy state of misery and ruin; tho' that disobedience, and that ruin were brought about by the malice of the fallen angels, creatures of their own species, and who had once been partakers of the same happiness and glory as themselves.

Thus too, when God, of his infinite mercy, was pleas'd to vouchsafe his compassion to the miseries of sinful man; and, in order to relieve them, sent down his only begotten Son into the world, to take our nature upon him, and to be born (as at this time) of a pure virgin: we find these blessed spirits expressing no less joy at the redemption of the world, than they had express'd at it's first creation. The occasion, indeed, was equally illustrious, great, and important. It was certainly, as high, if possible, a higher instance of the divine goodness to restore man to his favour, to re-entitle him to that happiness which, by his own perverse and ungrateful

ful

ful conduct, he had lost, than to invest him with it at first.

But still the holy angels were equally disinterested in both. The redemption was no redemption to them ; it was what they had neither any share in, nor advantage by ; it convey'd no advancement to the dignity of their nature, but rather the reverse : for our gracious Redeemer took not on him the nature of angels, but of men, and, by so doing, gave the preeminence to that nature which before was so greatly inferior to their own.

Yet, notwithstanding all this ; tho' at the same time, myriads of their own species were for their disobedience consign'd over to the blackness of darkness, void of the least hope or prospect of redemption : yet no sooner were the glad tidings of this supernatural birth discovered to the shepherds by one of these celestial messengers, but “ suddenly there was with the angel
“ a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, glory to God in
“ the highest, and on earth peace, Good-
“ will

“ will towards men ;” as much as to say, let there be ascrib'd all glory and praise to God in the highest heavens, since, by the incarnation of the Son of God, there is on earth peace, good-will towards men ; since, by this amazing condescension, the Almighty is reconciled to his revolted creatures, and they are again entitled to his favour and benevolence !

And certainly, if the consideration of this transcendent mercy had the power to raise the devotion of angels ; if it could excite them to songs of praise : what overflowing gratitude, love and zeal ought it to inspire us with, who have such superior motives ? who, when sunk into the lowest depth of guilt, wretchedness and ignorance ; not only exposed to uneasinesses and afflictions, to diseases and death in this world, but equally obnoxious to eternal torment in the world to come, were made the objects of redeeming mercy ! mercy, which far exceeds all that we could hope or think ! for how could we presume to hope that our offended creator

would ever deign to pity his degenerate, ungrateful and rebellious creatures? And not only pity our distress, but relieve it too; not by an immediate pardon of our guilt, (for that would have been inconsistent with his justice) but by sending his Son into the world, to assume our nature, with all its various infirmities (sinfulness alone excepted) to live an obscure, despised, penurious life; and to die a painful, ignominious death, for our sake, and in our stead; and by the oblation of himself, once offered to make a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world!

To what vehemence of admiration, as well as thankfulness and zeal, must we be excited, as oft as we reflect on this stupendous instance of mercy and condescension? when, in the first place, we consider the deplorable state we were reduc'd to, and the vile ingratitude and guilt that reduc'd us to it! And when, in the next place, we consider the gracious method that was applied to rescue us from it, and
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to give us a second opportunity of being easy here, and happy hereafter ! to afford effectual means of grace in this world, and a sure prospect and hope of glory in the world to come !

Nor let the behaviour of the angels instruct us only in gratitude and praise to God, but also in universal, unlimited love to our fellow-creatures. Let us, like them, rejoice at the happiness of others, tho' not allied to us, either by consanguinity, friendship, or interest. Let their advancement give us an inward, sincere pleasure, tho' we ourselves are not advanced : always proposing to our imitation the bright example of these blessed spirits, who, instead of indulging thoughts of envy, or expressing any symptom of regret at the surprizing honour done to man, and the inestimable benefit of redemption confer'd upon him, made it the pleasing subject of their praise !

And yet we cannot but allow (with a profoundly-learned author*) that if so
black,

* Mr. Mede.

black, so infernal a crime as envy could find admittance into a celestial breast, the holy angels could not have had a stronger inducement to it, than upon this occasion. The human nature, thus intimately connected with the divine, in the Son of God incarnate, was, by this means, advanced above theirs; was dignified with such honour as their nature was never dignified with; and this too, when, by our ingratitude and guilt, we had lost all claim to the divine compassion; whilst the rebellious ones of their own species, the apostate angels, whose redemption they might well be imagin'd to have a deeper concern for: they, for their disobedience, were cast down into hell, "delivered into chains of darkness, *" and reserved for future judgment, unpitied and unrelieved! Yet so far was all this from raising their envy, that, with the height of transport, they usher'd into the world its gracious redeemer, "praising God, and "saying, glory be to God in the highest, "and

* 2 Pet. ii. 4.

“ and on earth peace, good-will towards
“ men !”

Having thus far considered the behaviour of the holy angels on this great event, and the influence which the incarnation of the Son of God had on them : it will be proper now to enquire, what influence it ought to have on us. Gratitude and praise to God (as I have already observ'd) are duties pathetically recommended to us on this occasion, considering the amiable pattern which these blessed spirits gave us ; the unspeakable, tho' undeserv'd advantages which we (and we alone) receive from it ; together with the sublime honour done to our nature, thus united to the nature of God ; and, in the person of our merciful redeemer, exalted far above all principalities and powers, above all angels and archangels !

And this last consideration should more particularly inspire us with a due sense of our own dignity, and make us disdain
to

to do any thing that may lessen or de-
grade it.

Should we then be ever tempted to any inordinate sensual indulgence, to intemperance, voluptuousness or lust: let us duly consider, how dishonourable and base it would be to reduce that nature to the level of brute beasts, which once had upon earth, and even now, in heaven, has so close a union with the nature of God.

When tempted to hatred, envy, malice or aspersions; to do, or say, or think any thing in prejudice to our fellow-creatures: let us then reflect, that this is so far from keeping up to the dignity of our nature, that it even sinks it down to the disposition of those cursed apostate spirits, whose infernal works, and malicious intrigues our Saviour was manifested to destroy. And let the same argument have the same force, with regard to any irregular passion, or any mean pursuit, which naturally tends to debase that nature which the Son of God (as at this time) vouchsafed to take upon him.

And

And since he condescended to stoop so low to rescue his degenerate creatures from the bondage of sin, and power of Satan : since for us men, and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, divested himself of all his glory, and appeared in the humble form of a servant :

Let this induce us chearfully to submit to any instance of condescension, in order to relieve, comfort, or assist any of our fellow-creatures, tho' never so mean, never so much below ourselves in point of birth or fortune.

And let it stifle all our passionate and eager fondness for this world's enjoyments, and effectually restrain us from being vain or proud of those enjoyments, when we consider the state of life which our redeemer chose to appear in : a state, indeed, which is generally now, in this refin'd age, not only shun'd, but despised ; so violently shun'd, that some wretches sacrifice even their immortal souls to shun it : and so greatly despised, that there

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seems

seems to be almost a crime in being poor, tho' innocently poor ; in not being born to other circumstances, nor fix'd in a higher situation than what the providence of God has thought proper to assign us.

But whatever the vain, the arrogant and haughty may imagine ; how highly soever their titles, honours and riches may exalt them : yet let it be remember'd, that the Saviour of the world, the Son of God, when he condescended to appear on earth, chose not to appear in pomp and splendor, but assum'd the meanest, obscurest and poorest state of poverty itself !
“ The Son of man had not where to lay
“ his head. *”

And as the peace and good-will of God towards man was the happy consequence of our Redeemer's incarnation : let us strive to imitate the bright example, and cultivate mutual peace, and exert universal benevolence towards one another, even tho' it should prove our fate to meet with provocations and ill-usage. For since God
vouch-

* Luke ix. 58.

vouchsafed to be thus reconciled to us, his degenerate and rebellious creatures, who had so often and so highly displeased and affronted him: the least we can do is to forgive all injuries offer'd to ourselves; since the highest provocations we can receive from our fellow-creatures are trifling when compar'd with those which ungrateful man had offer'd to his God.

Thus let this amazing instance of divine mercy have its proper influence on our minds, by inspiring gratitude and fervent zeal with regard to our God; unspotted purity with regard to ourselves; condescension, meekness and beneficence, uninterrupted harmony, and universal love with regard to our fellow-creatures.

Otherwise, in vain do we pretend to rejoice, and indulge ourselves in mirth and feasting; in vain do we commemorate the important and happy event of our Lord's incarnation; since, unless we improve the advantages resulting from it; unless we cultivate those virtues which our redeemer came to instruct us in, and

shun those enormities which he came to redeem us from: better had it been for us, if the Son of God had never assum'd our nature; nay, better had it been for us, if we ourselves had never been born, than that we should be brought, either by a thoughtless indolence, or a blind, impious, and incorrigible perverseness, to disregard and neglect so great salvation.

Let then the virtues above-mentioned distinguish and adorn our christian character, and sanctify our gladness on this illustrious occasion.

Possess of these, which will always be a certain, unexhausted fund of inward joy, and a constant preparation for the most solemn exercises of devotion; let us (upon every convenient opportunity) with one heart, and one mind, approach the sacred altar.

There let us humbly and thankfully partake of those holy mysteries which our Redeemer himself has instituted and ordain'd as pledges of his love, and for a continual remembrance of what he suffered

ferred for us, to our great and endless comfort !

There let us pour out our hearts before our God, inwardly bewailing, and sincerely confessing our manifold sins and wickednesses ; imploring, with due earnestness, the divine pardon for all that is past ; and the divine grace to assist us for the future, by relieving our numerous frailties, strengthening and confirming our fickle resolutions, and conveying us, with triumph, thro' all temptations !

There let us testify our peace and harmony with all our neighbours, by jointly receiving the figures and representations of that body and blood which our Redeemer (as at this time) condescended to assume.

Let us display the extensiveness of our love and good will, by our fervent prayers, and cordial intercessions for all mankind.

Let us express our kind compassion for those in want, by such alms and oblations

as our condition in life will enable us to offer.

And lastly, there let us lift up our hearts unto the Lord, and (as it is meet, right, and our bounden duty) let us give thanks to our Lord God, as for all the instances of his mercy towards us, so especially (as being the fountain and foundation of all the rest) for giving his "only-begotten" Son to be born (as at this time) for us : "who, by the operation of the Holy-Ghost, was made very man of the substance of the virgin Mary his mother ; and that, without spot of sin, that he might make us free from all sin."

For which unspeakable and inestimable benefit, thus graciously confer'd upon us,

To God the Father, &c.

SERMON IX.

On our LORD'S HUMILITY.

MATT. xi. 29.

*Learn of me, for I am meek, and lowly
in heart.*

NOTHING will more powerfully contribute to our progress in righteousness than a fix'd attention to the amiable examples of the saints; than to observe, admire, and emulate the conduct of those whose lives have been illustrious for piety and virtue. This will not only direct us in our duty, but strongly excite us to the performance of it: will make us eager and ambitious to trace those paths which so many of our

fellow-creatures have trod before us, with resolution, success, and triumph.

But since even the most righteous amongst the sons of men, are and must be liable to inadvertencies, failures and mistakes ; our imitation must have some mixture of caution and reserve. We must follow them as they followed Christ, who is the only true standard of our imitation. In following him we can run no hazard of error or deviation. He will be our sure infallible guide thro' the intricate and dangerous wilderness of human life, " who (as the apostle expresses it) " did no sin, " neither was guile found in his mouth ; " who has left us an example, that we " should follow his steps, *" with an implicit, unreserved and universal compliance.

Let us therefore take a view of some of those conspicuous, amiable, and exemplary virtues which shone forth with a steady unvaried lustre, in all the actions and expressions of our blessed Redeemer, during his whole abode upon earth ; particu-

* 1 Pet. ii. 21.

ticularly his deep humility, his dispassionate meekness, his unshaken fortitude, his charity or universal benevolence, his patience, composure, and calm resignation amidst all the insults he received, and all the torments he endured !

And first let us contemplate his humility ; a virtue which well deserves to be consider'd as the foundation of all other virtues : Divesting the mind of all the prejudices of pride and self-conceit (which effectually choke and destroy the seeds of all improvement ;) and preventing the odious habits of envy, malice, censoriousness, and revenge.

This endearing virtue, together with that of meekness (which, indeed, naturally attends it) our Lord proposes himself as a pattern of, in the words before us. " Learn of me (says he) for I am " meek, and lowly in heart." A pattern so illustrious and attractive could never be found. It must raise our admiration and astonishment to reflect on the humility and condescension of the Son of God, who,

who, when he took upon him to redeem and deliver man, did not abhor or disdain the virgin's womb ! who left the throne of his father ; laid aside the glory which " he had with him, before the " world began ; * " and reduc'd himself almost to a level with his mean dependent creatures ! assuming, and of his own free choice submitting to, all the innocent infirmities of human nature ! Immense and infinite would have been his condescension, had he assum'd the sublimest state of earthly grandeur, and appear'd in such majesty, splendor and power as the ambitious Jews expected the Messiah to appear in.

But so far was he from entertaining the least fondness for outward pomp, that he chose to come into the world in all the circumstances of meanness and obscurity ; and to live a despis'd, penurious life, whilst he sojourn'd in it !

The

The place of his nativity was a stable; and a manger the cradle in which he was laid.

And tho' his parents were both of them sprung from the royal stem of David; yet was their situation in life of the lowest and poorest fort.

To them, in his younger years, he express'd his humility by all the instances of filial obedience, being (as the evangelist assures us) "subject (or. submissively dutiful) unto them. *"

In more advanced years, he preserved and displayed the same humble disposition in his whole conduct. Repeated and continued specimens do we find, in his history, of the profoundest humility and condescension.

When, in his thirtieth year, he enter'd upon his public office of preaching and instruction; tho' conscious of the dignity of his person, and the sublime nature of his commission; he assum'd no wordly pomp, no outward splendor, that might attract
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* Luke ii. 51,

the eyes, or command the attention and observance of those who heard him.

Choosing, for his followers and attendants, men of the lowest rank and education, poor illiterate fishermen !

Deigning to be supported by the charitable contributions of those " who ministered unto him out of their substance. *"

Declining all secular authority or power, even when urged to accept it. So averse was the humble Jesus to all earthly greatness, that when the multitude, struck with the sight of his stupendous miracles, were eager " to take him by force, and " make him a king : *" he, with no less eagerness, first sent away his disciples (who then had ambition enough to be fond of such a scheme) and immediately after withdrew himself into a solitary mountain : intimating, by this refusal, what he afterwards declar'd to Pilate, " that his " kingdom was not of this world. *"

When

* Luke viii. 3.

† John vi. 15.

† John xviii. 36.

When he rode to Jerufalem, the royal city; and the glad tidings were proclaim'd to Sion, that (in accomplishment of Zechariah's * prophecy) her king was come, not with the parade of regal equipage, but meek, and fitting "upon an ass, and a colt, the foal of an ass." adorned with no other furniture than the garments of his followers: he then, indeed, appeared to take some pleasure in the public respect that was paid him, and to vindicate the joy that was exerted on that occasion. But this respect was paid, and these applauses bestow'd, not by the rulers, or more distinguish'd Jews, but by the multitudes; and (as he himself expresses it, in the prophetic words of the psalmist) "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings." And this too at a time when our Lord was conscious to himself that the hour of his leaving the world was now approaching very near; when the applauses of those who considered him only as an earthly Redeemer, could not be

* Zech. ix. 9.

be supposed to exalt his mind in the least degree.

Human applause, indeed, our Lord was far from courting, or taking pleasure in, at any time. "I seek not my own glory," said he to the Jewish elders: and to prove that assertion, he chose to live in such circumstances as were sure to be attended with general contempt; and daily performed such actions as (he certainly knew) would expose him to the envy, malice, and persecuting rage of that perverse, stubborn and evil generation.

Not scrupling to sacrifice his reputation itself to the honour of God, and the benefit of mankind, by charitably conversing with publicans and sinners, with such as it was esteem'd a great diminution of character to have the least acquaintance or correspondence with.

Regardless of the praise or censures of man, his only endeavour was to approve himself to God in all he said or did. To instruct the ignorant, and bring sinners to repentance, appear'd to him a sufficient motive

motive to the greatest condescension, and more than overbalanced all the keen reproaches which the haughty Pharisees threw upon him on that account.

So remote was our blessed Saviour from the least degree of ostentation, that he industriously and earnestly conceal'd those actions which deserved the most exalted encomiums. And when he had wrought some beneficial and health-restoring miracle; he was so far from being studious to publish it, that he strictly enjoined silence to the person upon whom he had confer'd the blessing.

And when his mighty works, by reason of their striking lustre, could not escape the public observation; he exalted not himself in the least; imputed nothing to his own power, but ascribed all the glory to his father. "I can do nothing of myself," says he; the Father that dwelleth "in me He doeth the works." And in the like humble strain speaks he in another

ther place, "I seek not my own will,
" but the will of Him that sent me. *"

His conference with the woman of Samaria was so remarkable an instance of humility as to raise the surprise of his own disciples, who had seen so many instances of it upon other occasions: "they
" marvel'd that he talk'd with the wo-
" man" (says the evangelist;) for the Jews disdain'd to have any intercourse or correspondence with the Samaritans, upon the score of their different sentiments in some religious points. Yet was our Lord's conversation with her equally condescending, plain and instructive!

He graciously vouchsaf'd to receive, embrace and bless the children that were brought unto him, tho' his disciples, unwilling to have their Lord intruded on, " sternly rebuk'd those that brought
" them."

He likewise stoop'd to observe the rites and ceremonies of the Jewish church; and submitted to those institutions which
he

* John v. 30,

he had no need of, merely that he might set an example of religious conformity to all his disciples. Thus was he circumcised, presented in the temple, and baptised by the hands of St. John; tho' the Baptist modestly declined the performance; "I have need (says he) to be baptised of thee, and comest thou to me? But Jesus answering said unto him, suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness; *" to comply with every divine institution; with all the righteous ordinances of God, till he shall be pleased to cancel or supersede them.

Then too, so far was our Redeemer from behaving with distance towards even the meanest amongst his audience; that he graciously made an open declaration, that whosoever should do the will of his heavenly father, the same (without the least regard to quality, situation, or circumstances in the world) should be unto

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* Matt. iii. 14.

him "as his brother, and sister, and mother. *"

When a woman, from amidst the croud, thus express her applause and admiration of his divine persuasive eloquence, "blessed is the womb that bare thee:" Our Lord, in the humblest manner, declines the encomium, and only turns it into an occasion of exhorting his hearers to piety and virtue: "yea rather blessed are they that hear the word of God, and do it. †"

And, in order to inspire his followers with deep humility; to divest their minds of every ambitious, arrogant, and selfish thought; he, of whom the royal prophet had said, "let all the angels of God worship him;" and of whom we read in the evangelists, that the angels came and minister'd unto him; was yet so humble as to say of himself, "the son of man came not to be minister'd unto, but to minister;" not to be waited on, but to wait on others.

Accord-

* Matt. xii. 50.

† Luke xi. 28.

Accordingly, when they had been warmly disputing amongst themselves, which of them should be the greatest in their master's kingdom, which they then falsely imagined, and, till they were enlighten'd with the Holy Spirit, continued to imagine, would be an earthly one: that he might effectually prevent all such vain contests for the future, and stifle every sentiment of ambition in them; he, just before his leaving them and the world, "laid aside his garments, and took a towel, "and girded himself (this being the usual habit of the Jewish servants on such an occasion) "and washed, and wiped their "feet: and having given this remarkable specimen of humility, he thus address'd them, "know ye what I have done unto "you? ye call me Master and Lord; and "ye say well, for so I am: if I then, your "Lord and Master, have washed your "feet, ye also ought to wash one another's "feet: for I have given you an example,

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" that

“ that ye should do as I have done to
 “ you. *”

More astonishing still was that humility which was display'd in the closing scenes of his sojourning here below. When after having lived a penurious, oppress'd, and persecuted life, he submitted to die a servile, painful, and ignominious death! To be numbered with the transgressors, when he had previously sustain'd the scoffs and barbarous insults of the very abjects of the people!

Such and so illustrious is the pattern of humility and self-abasement, which the Redeemer of the world has laid before us. “ Who being in the form of God
 “ (says the apostle) thought it not robbery to be equal with God; yet made
 “ himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was
 “ made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he (still
 “ farther) humbled himself (to the very
 “ lowest degree of humiliation) and be-
 “ came

* John xiii. 4.

“ came obedient unto death, even the
“ death of the cross ! * ”

A pattern, which all who profess and call themselves christians, must (if they will act consistently with that character) perpetually strive to copy after, with all possible exactness.

’Tis not, indeed, required that we should renounce or lay aside all the distinguishing advantages of this life ; much less that we should throw ourselves into a state of poverty and distress, to prove our eagerness to trace our Lord’s example, or that of his apostles.

But certainly, we should hence be inspir’d with a due sense of our own unworthiness at least ; and learn to demean ourselves accordingly. And since our blessed Saviour thus lightly esteem’d all the honours and preeminences of this world : they whom providence has invested with the possession of them, should, by no means, overvalue or exalt themselves on that account : nor should they,

M 3

who

* Philip ii. 6.

who enjoy them not, indulge the least thought of discontent or fretfulness : nor should any of us too eagerly pursue, or be too passionately fond of them when obtain'd. On the contrary, let every vain assuming thought be mortified and suppress'd, when we recollect how the Son of God was abas'd ! let all earthly splendor be look'd upon with all the coldness and contempt it deserves, when we consider him who for us men, and for our salvation, not only came down from heaven, but made choice of the meanest state upon earth ; and condescended to endure the utmost ignominy and disgrace which fierce opposition, and virulent malice could throw upon him !

In due conformity to this bright example, let us learn to divest our minds of every ambitious, haughty, ostentatious and self-sufficient thought : exalted with no external advantages, or external ornaments, nor even the more valuable possessions of the mind : retaining, indeed,

deed, a modest consciousness of our own merits, and commendable performances; but so as never to cherish any arrogant opinion of ourselves, nor to look down with contempt on those whose possessions or attainments may, perhaps, be much inferior to our own. Ever willing to do good, merely for the sake of doing good; without the least mixture of vanity, or fond desire of human applause. Studious to promote, in all our actions, not our own glory, but the glory of that all-gracious Being, who is the giver of all good gifts; upon whose bounty we are all of us dependent; and from whom is derived the capacity both of excelling, and of serving others.

And whatever good we enjoy, or may be the happy instruments of diffusing;
“not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but
“unto thy name be ascrib'd the praise!”

Even to thee be ascrib'd, as is most due,
all honour, &c.

S E R M O N X.

On our LORD'S MEEKNESS.

MATT. xi. 29.

*Learn of me, for I am meek, and lowly
in heart.*

THE profound humility of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, came under consideration in the last discourse.

Proceed we now to take a view of that exemplary meekness of disposition which he still retain'd, even amidst the severest provocations, insults, and affronts.

This virtue is closely allied to that abovementioned ; or rather, is the natural result of it ; and consists in such a gentleness and calmness of temper as restrains the
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the mind from being easily inflam'd with the passion of anger. And he who is truly possess'd of it is so far from being thrown into a ferment upon every instance of coldness, disrespect, or injury, that he generously overlooks it ; at least, indulges no thoughts of retaliation or revenge : calmly reflecting that it is impossible but that offences will come, either from mistake or ill-nature, even against those who least deserve such treatment. Disregarding, or seeming to disregard, every slight provocation ; and sustaining, with due serenity those of a higher nature. With cheerfulness pardoning all who have offended him, when sensible of their fault, and desirous of pardon ; being equally ready to forgive, and to forget injuries.

Whilst he who wants humility is sure to want meekness. Pride, or an extravagant opinion of ourselves, together with a contemptuous one of others, inspires a quick sense of disrespect and ill-usage ; makes us frequently suspect affront where it never was intended ; exposes us to the
violent

violent inroads of boisterous passions; to rage, virulence, and a painful eagerness to revenge not only real, but imaginary wrongs.

Our blessed Redeemer, therefore, in the words of my text, joins these two virtues together, and proposes himself as a shining example of both. "Learn of me," says he, for I am meek and lowly in heart." To him alone we must have recourse for proper instructions with regard to the discipline of our passions. His constant behaviour, as well as his doctrine, strongly recommended the virtue of meekness to all his disciples.

The prophet Isaiah had long ago foretold, that when the Messiah's gracious appearance should bless the earth; and his gospel should be divulged and propagated; so happy a revolution should be brought about, that "the wolf should dwell with the lamb, and the leopard should lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion, and the fattling together, and a little child should lead them."

“ them. *” Insinuating, that all fierce discords, and mutual antipathies should then be calm'd and reconciled; all injuriousness, violence and ill-nature, should die away; universal peace and love should reign amongst men; and the most virulent, savage, and cruel dispositions should be converted into mild, pacific and humane!

And this most desirable change would certainly be produc'd; this prophecy would virtually, tho' not literally, be accomplished, if the doctrines of christianity were duly observed and obey'd; if all who profess themselves christians would behave as becomes that title, by following his steps whose meekness conspicuously appeared in all he said or did: in whose disposition we find not the least tincture of peevish moroseness; not the least inclination to offend or provoke any one; nor to be inflam'd or stung with resentment at the most injurious and severe provocations of others; but an amiable, endearing mixture of condescension, affability, calmness, and compassion.

St.

* *Ic. xi. 6.*

St. Matthew * quotes a prediction, from the abovementioned prophet, relating to our blessed Saviour, and exactly verified in him, which is this; “he shall not strive, nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets: †” denoting that the ministration of his public office should be free from contentious, wrangling, noisy tumult, and vain ostentation. “A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench.” By which proverbial expressions is intimated, that by his meek and gentle behaviour, he should encourage the despairing, and strengthen the weak-hearted; not ceasing to exert all acts of charity to the souls of those who are duly disposed to receive such mercy; tho’, as yet, they are weak, and not firmly established in the faith.

Thus with regard to his disciples—he gently and gradually instructed them, as they were able to bear instruction. Calmly conniving at, and forgiving the ignorance

* Matt. xii. 19.

† Is. xlii. 2.

rance of their minds, the deficiency of their memory, and the faintness of their resolution. Never failing, indeed, to admonish and rebuke them on these occasions; but in the most gentle and indulgent manner; generally in these soft terms "Do ye not yet understand, neither remember? Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?"

And when, amidst his painful agony in the garden, he had requested three of them to watch with him; and they, thro' the frailty of nature, had suffered themselves to be overpowered with sleep; addressing himself to that disciple who had express'd the warmest zeal, and firmest confidence in his behalf, he, with the utmost calmness, thus remonstrates, "Peter, sleepest thou? could'st thou not watch with me one hour?*" Making, at the same time, a kind apology both for him and his companions, "The spirit, indeed, is willing, but the flesh is weak!"

He

* Mark xiv. 37.

He was so far from being offended at those who brought their children to him, (tho' his disciples esteemed it a rude, indecent intrusion, and sternly rebuk'd those that brought them) that "he took the infants in his arms, laid his hands upon them, and blessed them. *"

He treated, with the utmost affability, all who came to consult him; meekly condescending to answer all their questions, even tho' impertinent; unless they were intended merely to ensnare him: then, indeed, he upbraided their fawning treachery with some degree of warmth; "why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? †"

But our Lord's meekness was most conspicuous amidst opposition, insult, and reproach.

Thus, when journeying towards Jerusalem he sent messengers ‡ before him into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him; and the inhabitants refus'd him the usual accommodation of travellers, because he seem'd to be going to Jerusalem,

to

* Mark x. 16.

† Matt. xxii. 18.

‡ Luke ix. 51.

to worship in the temple there, and to slight the temple which they had upon mount Gerizim: his disciples James and John, enraged at such a refusal, were eager to have their rudeness miraculously punish'd. "Lord, (said they) wilt thou
" that we command fire to come down
" from heaven, and consume them,
" even as Elias did?" But Jesus turn'd and rebuk'd them, saying, "ye know not
" what manner of spirit ye are of; for
" the Son of man came not to destroy
" mens lives, but to save them." Intimating, that the temper which the gospel requires has none of the vindictive spirit which that prophet exerted; but is composed of meekness, forbearance, peace and love, even towards those whose religious or political sentiments differ from our own. And that he might give them a persuasive example in his own person, without expressing the least resentment at this inhospitable, fullen, contemptuous, and brutish behaviour, "he pass'd on to
" another village."

When

When the meanness of his education was reflected on, and the people of Nazareth, where he had been educated, were, upon that account, offended in him: our Lord, without the least emotion of anger, said unto them, "a prophet is not
 " without honour, save in his own coun-
 " try, and in his own house. *"

The more scandalous imputation of being the friend and associate of publicans and sinners he calmly obviates by declaring, in another proverb, his charitable inducement to converse with people of that character: "they that are whole (says he)
 " need not a physician, but they that are
 " sick: I came not to call the righteous,
 " but sinners to repentance. †"

That audacious, as well as incoherent invective of the pharisees, "he casteth
 " out devils thro' Beelzebub the prince of
 " the devils, ‡" our Lord refutes by another incontestable maxim, "every kingdom
 " divided against itself is brought to de-
 " solation.

* Matt. xiii. 57. † Matt. ix. 12. ‡ Luke xi. 15.

“ solation. §” Thus mildly exposing the absurdity, and utter inconsistency of their virulent and blasphemous assertion!

And when the Jews took up stones to stone him, he thus gently upbraids their impetuous and unprovoked malice, “ many
“ good works have I shew'd you from
“ my father, for which of those works
“ do ye stone me ? *”

Thus did he answer all their opprobrious language, and groundless accusations, with cool tho' forcible argument; endeavouring, in the gentlest method, to remove the false injurious opinion which wayward prejudice had entertained of him.

Sometimes, indeed, he thought proper to change his style, and to address some of their leaders, the scribes and pharisees, in harsher terms: calling them “ hypo-
“ crites, fools and blind, an evil and adul-
“ terous generation, serpents, children of
“ the devil,” &c. These reproachful characters, and vehement invectives may perhaps, at first sight, seem inconsistent

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§ Luke xi. 17.

* John x. 32.

with our Saviour's meekness; with the wonted candor of his disposition and behaviour. But if we consider what inducements he had to exert this warmth, and to use these satyrical expressions, the objection will vanish. Whoever attends to the description which the evangelists give of the tempers and morals of the scribes and pharisees, will soon be convinced, that our blessed Lord was not more severe against them than they really deserved, and that the character he gave them was strictly just in all respects. It was not, indeed, the province of every private man to use such terms of reproach, as not being capable of discerning the inward disposition of the heart, nor invested with such authority as our Lord had to rebuke all sinners with unlimited freedom.

But he, who "knew what was in man," and came invested with an extraordinary commission from the Father, might, consistently with perfect meekness, be allowed to give them that character which they so well deserved.

John

Jon the baptist, by virtue of a divine commission, took the same freedom : " ye " generation of vipers" was his language to these depraved, hypocritical and ostentatious wretches. Much more might he, whom the Baptist acknowledg'd to be, far beyond all comparison, superior to himself. Especially when he had first applied the gentler methods of argument and calm reason ; and had wrought such mighty works in their sight.

In general, however, his expressions to them, as well as to all others, were most remarkably soft and mild, and full of the spirit of meekness.

And we may observe farther that tho' his indignation rose to such a height at spiritual pride, perverseness and hypocrisy ; when the honour of God was obstructed, or any violation offered to his holy temple : yet every personal indignity, every insult that was offered to himself ; he bore with the utmost serenity and meekness ; and calmly overlooked the most affecting in-

N 2

stances

stances of cold neglect, and base ingratitude.

Thus, when that zealous apostle, St. Peter, thro' timorousness and distrust, had denied him in the high priest's palace, contrary to his own vehement assertions, when solemnly forewarned of his future apostasy *; our Lord turn'd and look'd upon him, with a look of pity, rather than resentment; and which, indeed, pierced him more deeply than the most violent upbraidings could have done; such as constrained him to quit his master's presence, in order to discharge the anguish of his heart by weeping bitterly.

When another of his disciples, impiously as well as ungratefully betrayed him; and aggravated the guilt of his treachery by a deceitful kiss: instead of using such language as the wretch deserved, and a just resentment might have prompted; instead of railing against him, or upbraiding his monstrous ingratitude, avarice, and falseness; he thus mildly expostulates
with

* Luke xx. 61.

with him, "friend, wherefore art thou
"come *?" and again, "Judas, betray-
"est thou the son of man with a kiss? †"
Must I, by such a token, be delivered
up into the hands of my cruel ene-
mies!

Thus too, when Peter, thro' the vio-
lence of his zeal, had smote the high-
priest's servant Malchus, and cut off his
right ear: our Lord, mildly addressing
himself to the soldiers, entreats them to
indulge him with liberty whilst he might
work a miracle of mercy upon one who
came to seize him: "suffer ye thus far,
"said he, and he put forth his hand, and
"healed him. ‡"

Equally dispassionate was the speech
which he made to the chief-priests, the
captains of the temple, and the elders,
who had brought an armed band to ap-
prehend him: "be ye come out as against
"a thief, with swords and staves? I was
"daily with you in the temple, and ye
"stretched

N 3

* Matt. xxvi. 50.

† Luke xxii. 48.

‡ Luke xxii. 52.

“ stretched forth no hands against me :
“ but this is your hour, and the power of
“ Darkness.*”

The same meekness of temper he retain'd amidst the last and severest efforts of their malicious rage, when they drag'd him to judgment and execution. Not all the rude insolence of the soldiers ; not all the false accusations that were laid against him ; not all the cruel mockings, and shameful indignities offered to him, could extort one resentful or menacing expression !

Even when stretched upon the cross, the meek and humble Jesus compassionately interceded, and fervently pray'd for the unrelenting authors of his shame and torture !

Thus truly accomplishing that prophecy of Isaiah, “ he was oppress'd, and he
“ was afflicted, yet open'd he not his
“ mouth !” When he was reviled (says
“ St. Peter) he reviled not again, when
“ he suffered, he threatned not ; but
“ com-

* Luke xxii. 52.

“ committed himself to Him that judgeth
“righteously.”

Such is the amiable pattern of meekness, or restraint of anger, which our blessed Saviour displayed amidst the severest provocations! an example, which, if duly attended to, must have an almost resistless influence on our minds, amidst all temptations to rage, or peevish resentment; since the Lamb of God sustain'd, with calmness, more provoking insults, reproaches, and ill-treatment, than we can have an opportunity of sustaining. And shall we, who call ourselves his disciples, be so shamefully inconsistent as to indulge an opposite disposition? shall we be thrown into a ferment, or cherish thoughts of revenge, upon every slight provocation? Shall our temper lie at the mercy of every cross accident that thwarts our humour, obstructs our interest, or deludes our hope; or be possess'd with a fixed aversion to those whose sentiments are different from our own; when he so meekly endur'd

repulses, disappointments, and continual opposition from an ungrateful and perverse world? shall we be inflam'd with strong and lasting resentment upon every instance of disrespect or contempt; every slight reflexion on our character; when the Son of God was aspersed with the most odious imputations and invectives? When he serenely bore the most affronting, contemptuous and cruel usage that envy and malice could exert against him: when he, who was all goodness and benevolence, was betrayed by his own disciple, deserted and disowned by his dearest friends; and treated with the utmost barbarity by those on whom he had confer'd, or, at least, had strove to confer, the greatest benefits.

All this did he suffer without the least emotion of rage or resentment; and, instead of threatening revenge, express'd the sincerest pity, tenderness and love for those who thirsted for his blood, and rejoiced over all his sufferings! "Father forgive
" them,

“ them, for they know not what they
“ do !”

To this illustrious and perfect pattern let our thoughts be directed, whenever we are in danger of being fir'd with rage, of having the serenity of our minds unhing'd or discomposed by the unkind, perverse, or ungrateful behaviour of those around us. Let us hence be induced to restrain our resentment within the bounds of reason and moderation. Calmly conniving at all slight provocations, and willing to bury in oblivion those of a higher nature. Not daring to sacrifice our religion to false notions of honour ; as if it were a mark of cowardice or meanness of spirit to suffer even the least affront to go unreveng'd. And tho', in the eyes of a degenerate and depraved world, this meekness of behaviour may seem an argument of a tame, servile spirit ; and may lay us more open to injurious treatment : it will, however, truly exalt the mind, and qualify us for that future state of glory, which is promised
and

and reserv'd for the "poor in spirit," for
"the meek and lowly in heart."

So shall we find "rest to our souls" in
the present life; and be crown'd with e-
ternal peace, joy and happiness in the
life to come !

Amen.

SER.

S E R M O N XI.

ON OUR LORD'S PATIENCE.

H E B. xii. 3.

Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself.

OUR blessed Saviour's exemplary meekness was consider'd in a former discourse. A virtue, which all, who profess themselves his disciples, are obliged to exert amidst all provocations, insults, and affronts. A virtue, which enables us to restrain our resentment, tho' perhaps justly raised, within the bounds of moderation : never suffering that tumultuous passion to overpower and captivate our reason, nor to introduce a sullen resolution to be revenged on those by whom
we

we have been insulted, provoked or injured.

Meekness, however, must not be thought to supersede all resentment, or induce us to be so tamely passive upon all occasions, as never to reprove an impious indecency ; to contradict a false malicious assertion ; or to display some warmth of indignation, when a just occasion of offence excites that passion.

To be angry, in some cases, is no less innocent than to rejoice, to grieve, to hope to fear, or to exert any other passion of the mind.

St. Paul, in that advice of his to the Ephesians, " be ye angry, and sin not," intimates that we may be angry, and yet not sin ; that we may be displeased, and openly shew our displeasure, whenever we meet with a just incentive to it.

Even our Lord himself, tho', beyond all example, meek, " looked round about " with anger on those who watched him " whether he would heal on the sabbath day,

“ day, that they might accuse him. *” And with the utmost violence of zeal did he “ cast out of the temple all that bought “ and sold therein, overthrow the tables “ of the money-changers, and the seats “ of them that sold doves ;” exasperated and enrag’d at their rude and impious violation of that sacred place.

When such as these are the incentives, our anger is not only innocent, but commendable and virtuous ; and to be unmov’d, upon such occasions, would betray an irreligious indolence, and want of zeal.

But when any affront is offered to our own person or character ; or any injurious encroachment made upon our property ; meekness should restrain us from all violent and lasting emotions of rage ; and from all vindictive resolutions, tho’ we should be reduced to the harsh and painful necessity of asserting our legal claim by a legal process. Still fixing our eyes on him who, tho’ perpetually thwarted, opposed,

* Mark iii. 5.

opposed, reproached, insulted, and pursued with restless unrelenting malice, during his whole abode upon earth ; sustain'd and "suffered such contradiction of sinners against himself" with the utmost composure, serenity and meekness !

And this leads us to consider another virtue which our Lord's example recommends to our imitation, particularly amidst affliction, distress and pain ; the virtue of patience. A virtue, which he display'd amidst all the various hardships and severe trials that attended him thro' all the scenes of a penurious and persecuted life, and in a more eminent and remarkable manner towards the close of it ! Under all his bitter sufferings not one fretful, passionate or impatient expression ever proceeded out of his mouth !

Tho' an utter stranger to what we call pleasures and enjoyments, and exposed to continual fatigue, and restless wandering ; we never find him complaining or dissatisfied ; never discouraged or deprest ; never anxious to improve his condition, but enduring

during it with serenity and chearfulness ! firmly pursuing, amidst all inconveniences, the great design he had form'd of promoting the glory of God, and the happiness of man !

Nothing can have a stronger tendency to depress the mind, and exhaust our patience, than to have our kind intentions perpetually misconstrued ; to be contemned, hated, and abused, merely for endeavouring to do good.

Yet such was the treatment our blessed Saviour met with. Instead of the deserved returns of gratitude, he was still reproached, and persecuted, for the most shining and exalted instances of benevolence and goodness.

In reward for the generous and unwearied pains he took for the instruction and salvation of mankind, he was branded with the odious character of an impostor : " nay, but he deceiveth the people. *"

When

* John vii. 12.

When he imparted that greatest of all blessings, the remission of sins; and confirm'd his authority for so doing, by a most beneficent miracle: what an uncharitable and impious censure was cast upon his goodness by the scribes and pharisees! "This man (said they) blasphemeth."

When striving to reclaim his hearers from vice and error; to fix their steps in the paths of duty; making the most endearing overtures of grace and mercy; pointing out, both by his doctrine and example, the way to happiness: he was almost universally suspected and condemned; and his gracious endeavours were baffled and disappointed thro' their obstinate perverseness and unbelief!

Yet not all this monstrous usage could unhinge his frame of mind, nor restrain his kind endeavours for the benefit of those whom he came down from heaven to redeem and save!

Such were the severe trials of patience which our Lord met with, during the whole

whole course of his ministration. And still severer trials did he struggle with, and subdue, when the time drew near that he should leave the world, and return to the Father.

Amidst his bitter agony in the garden, when both soul and body struggled with anguish inexpressible; when he was constrained to own that his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: with what calm resignation did he thus address his Father, "not my will, but thine be done? *"

Afterwards, when betray'd and deliver'd up into the hands of his cruel enemies; not all the sufferings he endur'd were able to extort from him one impatient word; but calm submission and decent resolution appear'd in his whole behaviour.

When dragg'd before the Sanhedrim, whilst his persecutors laid many and grievous things to his charge which they could not prove: instead of being enraged or

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* Luke xxii. 42.

disturbed at their false and groundless accusations, he "held his peace."

When the high-priest's officer had the insolence to strike him, not only without provocation, but without any order from the council; he calmly bore the rude insult, with only making this mild remonstrance, "if I have spoken evil, "bear witness of the evil; but if well, "why smitest thou me?*"

When Pilate, overcome by the importunate clamours of the multitude, had decreed him to be scourged; and the soldiers spit upon him, mock'd him; and offer'd the most shameful indignities to his sacred person; yet did his patience triumph over all their barbarous and savage treatment: exactly verifying that prophecy in Isaiah which so deeply affected the Æthiopian eunuch, and made him so anxious for an explanation with regard to the person alluded to: "He was led as a "sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb
"dumb

* John xviii. 23.

"dumb before his shearers, so open'd
"he not his mouth. *"

When stretched upon the cross, indeed, he once complain'd, or seem'd to complain, in crying out "my God, my God, "why hast thou forsaken me?" But in this expostulation he only repeats the beginning of the 22d Psalm, which had been wrote a thousand years before, and foretells the sufferings of the Messiah, in a most minute and circumstantial manner: in these words he earnestly addresses himself to God, as one in whom he had a sure interest, notwithstanding all the severity of his present sufferings, and into whose hands he soon after resign'd his departing spirit, in a firm, serene, and lively confidence. "Father, into thy hands
"I commend my spirit. †"

Nor was this patience derived from dull insensibility, or a stubborn resolution not to complain; but from a calm submission to the will of his heavenly Father; a perfect dominion over his passions; un-

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* Acts viii. 32.

† Luke xxiii. 46.

bounded love, and tender pity for the sons of men. "The cup which my Father
" has given me (says he to St. Peter) shall
" I not drink it?*" And to the Jews,
" I lay down my life of myself, (thro'
my own free choice) " I have power to
" lay it down, and I have power to take
" it again. This commandment have I
" received from my Father. And again,
" the bread which I give is my flesh,
" which I will give for the life of the
" world."

That our Lord had a quick and vigorous sense of suffering, is evident from his agony in the garden; where, in a cold and damp night, when the season was so severe that the high priest's servants were reduc'd to the necessity of warming themselves at the fire: "his sweat was, as it
" were, great drops of blood falling down
" to the ground."

That his human nature shrunk back at the apprehension of that bitter cup which he was going to drink, is manifest from
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* John xviii. 11.

the strong reluctance which he thus express'd, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me."

Yet tho' no sorrow was like unto his sorrow, wherewith (as the prophet had foretold) the Lord did afflict him in the day of his fierce anger : with all the calmness of patience did he bear the weight of that anger, till he had satisfied and appeased it by the voluntary sacrifice of himself !

When he was now going to be nail'd to the cross; and the stupifying draught of wine mingled with myrrh was offer'd to him ; a draught call'd by the Psalmist "a drink of deadly wine ;" which was usually given to those under condemnation, in order to intoxicate them, and to prevent the sense of pain : that he might display the greatness of his patience, and his readiness to suffer the extremest tortures for a sinful world, our blessed Saviour declin'd the offer, and "receiv'd it not," says St. Mark : or, as St. Matthew relates the circumstance, (to the same effect) "when he had tasted

“ thereof (and perceived what it was) he
“ would not drink of it.”

Such was the heroic patience which the Saviour of the world exerted amidst the heaviest sufferings, tho’ keenly sensible of those sufferings; and, at the same time, conscious of the most perfect innocence, and how far he was from deserving such cruel treatment.

His answer to the penitent thief; his recommending the blessed virgin to the care of his favourite disciple; together with his charitable intercession in behalf of his crucifiers, prove him to have been entirely capable of feeling anguish, tho’ his patience was superior to it; and that his mind was calm and composed amidst the utmost tortures of his body.

Let this bright example occur to our thoughts, whenever we labour under trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity.

• The contemplation of a suffering redeemer must restrain all murmurings, silence all complaints, and arm the mind
against

against all afflictions. For since the Lamb of God sustain'd so heavy a load of grief and pain, without indulging the least degree of impatience ; since " the captain " of our salvation was thus made perfect " thro' suffering : " for us to murmur and complain ; to shrink back in the day of trial ; or to be " weary and faint in our " minds " under the pressure of a much lighter burden than his was ; would be equally inconsistent with our christian character, and disgraceful to it.

" Whoever will be my disciple (says " our Lord) let him take up his cross, " and follow me ; " submitting to all the hardships and miseries of poverty and persecution which the profession of christianity would, at that time, unavoidably bring upon him.

In the present age, the case is far different. God calls not all his servants, not any of them, indeed, in these realms, to so severe a trial. And a man may be a very sincere christian without taking up his cross, and enduring a heavy load of

temporal afflictions. But he deserves not the name of a christian who, under the pressure of disappointment, losses, pain, sickness, necessity, or disgrace, thwarts the kind intention of his heavenly Father by peevish reluctance, or fretful murmuring : nor yet he, whose heart is not possessed with a stedfast resolution to suffer, when occasion serves, the utmost inconvenience or distress, rather than make shipwreck of faith, and a good conscience; rather than commit, encourage, or connive at, the least instance of deliberate guilt: and when really driven to the dilemma of either enduring affliction, or violating the rules of his religion; will not make such a choice as his conscience will suggest, and submit to all the consequences of that choice, with the same serene and chearful patience which the Son of God exerted amidst the severest treatment that malice and rage could inflict !

This treatment he, tho' altogether innocent, patiently endured for our sake, and in our stead: whilst our calamities

(as

(as the prophet Jeremiah observes) are "the punishment of our sins. *" Even the most righteous of us all must be constrain'd to confess, with the penitent malefactor on the cross, that "we suffer justly, and receive the due reward of our "deeds," tho' the hardships we endure may seem heavy and oppressive. How heavy soever they may be, we still must acknowledge them lighter than we deserve; and far lighter than those which the Son of God so patiently endured for our redemption.

Shame itself will restrain our impatience, when we consider the example which he has set before us.

Fretfulness and discontent will effectually be remov'd, and the burden of affliction will become supportable and easy to the mind, by having our thoughts fix'd on the result of his sufferings, and of ours too, if decently and properly sustained; on that sublime reward of calm perseverance, that crown of life and glory which

* Lam. iii. 39.

which he has promised to all who love him in sincerity and truth ; and whose earnest ambition it is to copy after him in this, as well as all other virtues.

Of which happy number that we may all of us be,

*God, of his infinite mercy, grant,
thro' Jesus Christ our Lord!*

SER.

S E R M O N XII.

On our LORD's BENEVOLENCE.

JOHN xiii. 34.

A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

WE have already taken a view of that profound humility, that serene meekness, and that unwearied and unexhausted patience, which shone conspicuously in our redeemer's whole conversation and behaviour, whilst he sojourn'd amongst us here upon earth.

Proceed we therefore now to consider that generous, extensive and disinterested benevolence and love which he exerted

towards the sons of men, in all he did, or said, or suffer'd. Whose daily and constant employment it was to do good both to the bodies, and the souls of men. Who "went about all the cities and villages (as the Evangelist informs us) "teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness, and every disease among the people.*" Whose time was peculiarly devoted to acts of beneficence and mercy, such as instructing the ignorant; reproving and admonishing the guilty; inviting sinners to repentance; encouraging the penitent; and restoring the diseased and infirm to perfect health and strength. Whose whole life, in short, was one continued and illustrious display of impartial goodness, and universal love!

With eagerness did he improve all opportunities of being kind and serviceable to mankind; and sustain'd almost perpetual fatigue in finding such opportunities.

* Matt. ix. 35.

ties: wandering about from place to place, that he might discover fit objects of his charitable pity!

And whoever applied to him for aid and relief was sure to have his application crown'd with success.

Not one instance do we find, in all the sacred history, of our Lord's rejecting an earnest petitioner, or refusing to impart comfort or assistance to those who, thro' a lively faith, were qualified to receive such mercy.

So intensely desirous to diffuse his goodness was the compassionate Jesus, as to sacrifice his own ease, and to disregard his own accommodation, rather than suffer others to be disappointed of his aid, instruction, or relief.

When throng'd by the vast crouds that followed and surrounded him, even amidst the deserts of Bethsaida, whither he had retir'd for a small respite: "he
" had compassion on the multitude, be-
" cause they were as sheep not having
" a shepherd;" and, instead of resenting
their

their intrusion and importunity, "he taught
" them many things ;" healed those that
had need of healing ; and fed five thou-
sand of them at one time, four thousand
at another.

Observe we too that our Lord's kind-
nesses were bestowed without the least
partiality, or distinction of persons. He
never despised any one for the penurious-
ness of his circumstances ; nor even re-
jected the ignorant and guilty, if they
were but inspir'd with a fervent desire of
becoming wiser and better ; of learning
their duty, and reforming their conduct.

He even deign'd to converse with those
of the most odious and profligate charac-
ters, with publicans and sinners ; induc'd
by the charitable motive of converting
them, of opening their eyes, in a spiritu-
al sense ; and pointing out the paths of
life ; tho' his own character was sure to
suffer by this compassionate condescen-
sion.

" The Son of man (says he) is come
" to seek and to save that which is lost ;
" parti-

“ particularly the lost sheep of the house
“ of Israel.” And therefore we find him
paying a distinguishing regard to that na-
tion, which had hitherto been the pecu-
liar people of God, and chosen out of all
the nations of the earth.

But, to convince the world that he in-
tended not to confine his charitable good-
ness to the Jews, he extended it likewise
to the Samaritans; and, as occasion serv'd,
to the gentiles, or heathens, too.

Not long after that rude and brutish re-
pulsé which he received from some of the
Samaritan people, and which our Lord's
meekness calmly overlook'd: pursuing his
journey from their confines towards Jeru-
salem, ten lepers met him, and humbly
besought him to relieve their deplorable
condition; “ Jesus, master, have mercy
“ on us !” This request he immediately
and impartially granted to them all, tho'
one of them, and he the only grateful one
amongst the ten, was a Samaritan.

As to the cold disregard which our
Lord display'd, and the strong reluctance
which

which he express'd, in granting the earnest petition of the woman of Canaan, who (we must observe) was a Syrophœnician and an heathen: it was merely to prove the strength and sincerity of her faith, which he afterwards commended, in terms of high applause, mix'd with admiration, and rewarded accordingly: "O woman, " great is thy faith; be it unto thee even " as thou wilt.*" And, "for this saying go thy way, the devil is gone out " of thy daughter. †"

And surprising was the strength and energy of that faith which could persevere amidst such repulses, and such appearance of stern disdain; and, at the same time, had not the promise of a Messiah (which was esteem'd peculiar to the Jewish nation) to encourage and support it. This, however, is the only instance of his making the least hesitation in extending his gracious beneficence to those who placed a due confidence in his power, and earnestly implor'd his charitable assistance.

So

* Matt. xv. 28.

† Mark vii. 29.

So far was our blessed Lord from rejecting any real objects of compassion; that he frequently sav'd them the trouble of application, and kindly offer'd and imparted Relief to such as had no notion of applying to him for it.

Various instances of this sort do we meet with in the history of the gospel.

Thus, when the man *, who had continued infirm for thirty and eight years, lay at the Pool of Bethesda, helpless of himself, and unassisted by any one else; the compassionate Jesus not only restor'd him to health and strength, without the trouble of bathing; but afterwards, having found him in the temple, kindly directs him to consult his eternal health, the health of his soul: "go thy way, sin no more; lest (for thy ingratitude and contempt of this mercy) a worse thing come unto thee."

Another instance we find in his raising to life the widow's son, at Nain, by an unrequested and unexpected miracle. †

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* John v.

† Luke vii. 11.

The mournful distress of an affectionate mother, bereft of her only son, in a state of widowhood, now destitute of support, was sufficient to excite our Saviour's compassion; and "he said unto her, weep
" not. And he came and touch'd the
" bier, and said, young man, I say unto
" thee arise. And he that was dead sat
" up, and began to speak, and he deliver'd
" him to his mother."

Thus too, the woman who had been afflicted with a "spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together,
" and could in no wise lift up herself,*"
durst not have entertained the thought of applying for relief on the sabbath-day; in the presence too of the ruler of the synagogue, who broke out into such indecent and spiteful rage at seeing the miracle perform'd, absurdly representing it as a violation of the sabbath: but "when Jesus
" saw her, he called her to him, and said
" unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from
" thine infirmity: and he laid his hands
" on

* Luke xiii.

“ on her, and immediately she was made
“ straight, and glorified God,” for a mercy so great, and so unexpected !

It would swell this discourse far beyond the usual compass, were I only to point out one half of those beneficial and salutary miracles which our gracious Redeemer performed on the diseas'd, the lame, the blind, and those that were possess'd with evil spirits : improving the supernatural power he was invested with, perpetually to the advantage of mankind, both with respect to this life and the next : but not once exerting it to the disadvantage of ever his most inveterate enemies.

Entirely disinterested he manifestly was, in all the exertions of his love and beneficence, prompted by no other motive, and excited by no other reward, than merely the satisfaction and pleasure of doing good : and still persevering to exert his goodness, amidst the highest provocations and affronts ; thus (agreeably to the injunction which he has laid on all his disciples) returning “ good for evil :” Con-

tinuing to pray for his enemies, and extending his compassion towards them (as in the case of Malchus) even when in open arms against him, "to take away his life."

Then too, with what endearing affability, gentleness and affection, did he receive and treat those who came unto him, with a view of being instructed, reform'd, and sav'd !

And with what depth of inward concern does he deplore the fate of those who, thro' perverseness and stubborn infidelity, disdain'd to accept the benefits thus kindly and affectionately offer'd to them !

Nothing can be more moving and pathetic than the charitable sorrow he express'd, and that profusion of tears which, just before his crucifixion, he shed over Jerusalem, and, together with that ill-fated metropolis, the whole perverse nation of the Jews. " O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou
" that killest the prophets, and stonest
" them that are sent unto thee, how of-
" ten would I have gather'd thy children
" together,

“ together, even as a hen gathereth her
“ chickens under her wings, and ye would
“ not ! ”

Even when stretch'd upon the cross,
and labouring under the severest agonies,
he made the kindest apology for his crucifiers that love itself could dictate ; and, with his dying breath, recommended them to his Father's mercy. “ Father, forgive
“ them, for they know not what they
“ do ! ”

Such was the generous, impartial, diffusive, exalted and disinterested love and beneficence, which the Son of God display'd and exerted towards the race of mankind, whilst he condescended to dwell amongst us ! Thus “ went he about continually doing good.”

And tho' his loving-kindness was repaid with shameful ingratitude, with contempt, reproaches and persecution ; yet suffer'd he not his love to decrease, but submitted to all the tortures of an ignominious death, that he might procure e-

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ternal

ternal happiness, not only for his friends, but even for his enemies!

Thus manifesting his gracious benevolence, and boundless love to sinful man, in his incarnation, his life, and his death.

On this illustrious example let our eyes be ever fix'd, and fix'd with such attention, that our hearts may be inspir'd and warm'd, not only with gratitude and affection to our redeemer, but also with sincere, cordial and universal benevolence to our fellow-creatures; with mutual and sympathetic love.

Let us hence learn to exclude from our breasts every selfish, mean, and partial view; and to eradicate the seeds of bitterness, virulence, contentiousness and ill-nature.

“ Putting on (as the elect of God, holy
 “ and beloved) bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness,
 “ long-suffering *; forbearing one another
 “ and forgiving one another, if any man
 “ have a quarrel against any; even as
 “ Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And
 “ above

* Col. iii. xii.

“ above all these things (proceeds the apostle) put on charity (or universal benevolence) which is the bond of perfectness ;” the most perfect bond of union, and, consequently, of social happiness, amongst christians.

This is that exalted and comprehensive virtue which our Lord himself has pointed out, as the peculiar and distinguishing mark of his disciples ; which St. Paul asserts to be the fulfilling of the law ; as inclusive of every social and moral duty.

A virtue, which will not only supersede and remove all malice, envy, moroseness, and revenge ; but will inspire us with an eager and ambitious desire to do all the good we can to all around us, freely and impartially.

Will produce in the mind a pleasing and perpetual satisfaction here below ; and qualify us (thro' the merits of our redeemer) to find admission into those regions of peace, harmony, and mutual endearment, where he, who so intensely

loved us, as to purchase our salvation with
the price of his own most precious blood,
for ever sitteth at the right hand of God.

To him, therefore, with the Father,
 &c.

SER-

SERMON XIII.

On Our LORD'S FORTITUDE.

HEB. xii. 2.

Who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame.

OUR blessed Saviour's humility, meekness, patience, and universal love have already been enlarged upon. Let us now contemplate that exemplary fortitude, that strength of resolution, and unshaken firmness of mind, which he exerted amidst all trials, difficulties and dangers, whilst he sojourn'd here upon earth.

His steadfastness in resisting and subduing the various artifices of the tempter in the wilderness has been heretofore consider'd in a separate discourse, together with the useful

ful instructions thence arising, and the powerful encouragements which we receive, or may receive, from so shining an example.

At present, therefore let us take a short view of the firmness he display'd amidst the repeated and various trials he met with at the hands of men.

And we shall find him, thro' the whole course of his ministry, whilst pursuing the gracious scheme of our redemption, neither elevated with applause; deluded by fair pretences; dejected with reproach; terrified by threats; nor overpower'd by the extremity of torture.

Thus, for instance; having fed many * thousands of those who came to hear him, with five barley loaves, and two small fishes; when, tho' they were all satisfied, twelve baskets were fill'd with what remain'd: the multitude struck with the greatness of the miracle, and perceiving with what ease he could supply them with provisions, were eager to take him by force, and set him up for their king.

He,

* John vi.

He, knowing this to be utterly inconsistent with his design of coming into the world, evaded their intention, and retir'd unto a solitary mountain.

At another time, his enemies endeavour'd to insnare him with fair speeches, and to entangle him in his talk; saying, with insidious flattery, "Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth; neither carest thou for any man, for thou regardest not the person of men: tell us, therefore, what thinkest thou? is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not?*" Thus expecting to take advantage of his decision, on which side soever he gave it: if he should say No, then to represent him as an enemy to the Roman emperor: if Yes, then to represent him as an enemy to their liberties, the liberties of the Jewish nation.

But our Lord, discerning their hypocrisy, gave them such an answer as fully came up to the question, without allowing them any room to accuse him, as they maliciously

* Matt. xxii.

ly had intended. “ Shew me (says he) a penny,” a piece of your current coin: “ whose image and superscription hath it ?” they say unto him, Cæsar’s: (which by their own rules, was an evidence that Cæsar’s government had obtain’d amongst them) “ And he said, render therefore to Cæsar “ the things that are Cæsar’s”—the tribute due to him, as your earthly sovereign; “ and to God the things that are God’s”—the tribute requir’d, by the levitical law, from all above twenty years of age, towards the repairs of his holy temple.

The vehement and inveterate hatred which the rulers had conceiv’d against him was, for the most part, open and undisguis’d, known to all the common people, as well as to himself: every moment, therefore, he was in danger, and knew that he was in danger, of his life. But this, we see, could not deter him from fulfilling, in the most unconceal’d and public manner, the “ work “ of him that sent him.”

Our Lord, indeed, would sometimes take an opportunity of withdrawing himself,

in order to escape the hands of his cruel enemies, and to disappoint their malicious rage. Instructing us, by this example, that it is lawful to avoid imminent danger, by fleeing from the face of those that hate us : and prudent it must be to retire on such an occasion, rather than expose ourselves to unnecessary hazards (which would be rashness instead of fortitude) by keeping within the reach of those who are bent upon our ruin. Recommending thus, by his own practice, the injunction which he afterwards laid upon his disciples, “ when
“ they persecute you in one city, flee unto
“ another.”

But he never deserted the great work which he had undertook, nor omitted, thro' timorousness, any one branch of his public office, but still persever'd in preaching the gospel, and extending his goodness to the souls and bodies of men, whithersoever he retir'd : equally pursuing that great end for which he came into the world, notwithstanding the scene was varied.

Then

Then too, he never would neglect an opportunity of exerting his beneficence, tho' on the sabbath-day, and in the presence of the scribes and pharisees; when conscious that his doing so would be imputed as a most enormous crime; that to perform even acts of mercy on that day would (by their preposterous construction) be condemned, as a daring violation of the fourth commandment; and provoke their utmost virulence against him.

So far was he from being deprest with the apprehension of those cruel effects of their power and malice which he had the utmost reason to apprehend, that he openly upbraided their hypocrisy and spiritual pride in the strongest and severest terms; vindicated his own conduct to their face; and avowed his divine nature and commission in the plainest and most intelligible manner. "I know (said he) that the witness which John the baptist witnesseth of me is true *. Ye sent unto him and he bare witness of the truth.
" But

* John v. 32.

“ But I have greater witness than that of
“ John ; for the works which the Father
“ hath given me to finish, the same works
“ that I do bear witness of me, that the
“ Father hath sent me *. And the Father
“ himself which hath sent me, hath
“ born witness of me. Search the scrip-
“ tures, for in them ye think ye have
“ eternal life, and they are they which
“ testify of me. †”

And when, at the feast of the dedica-
tion, they came round about him in Solo-
mon's porch, and said unto him, “ how long
“ dost thou make us to doubt ? if thou
“ be the Christ, tell us plainly. He an-
“ swered them, I told you, and ye be-
“ lieved not. The works that I do in
“ my Father's name, they bear witness of
“ me. ‡” As if he had said, what room
have ye to be in any sort of suspense con-
cerning me ; or what necessity is there for
my declaring myself to be the Messiah,
in express terms ? since this sufficiently
appears from the miracles I work, the
sure,

* John v. 36.

† ver. 39.

‡ John x. 24.

sure, infallible tokens of a supernatural and divine power.

He frequently foretold to his disciples all his future sufferings, in an open, plain, and circumstantial manner, with the utmost composure and serenity.

And when Peter, thro' an inconsiderate fondness for his master, and a vain expectation of the Messiah's temporal dominion, could not bear the thought of his being treated with such rude and fatal cruelty : our Lord rebuked him with more warmth than he was ever known to express towards any of his disciples, " saying, get thee behind me, Satan, thou art an offence unto me : for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men : " tempting me to disobey my Father's will, and shewing more regard to earthly grandeur, than the glory of God, and the salvation of men.

With punctual regularity did he celebrate all the solemn festivals, tho' he well knew

* Matt. xvi. 21.

knew that the Jews lay in wait to take away his life. He even "went up into "the temple and taught*" amidst the thickest concourse of the people, at the feast of tabernacles; so as to raise the astonishment of those in Jerusalem who were no strangers to the designs of the pharisees against him: "is not this he " (said they) whom they seek to kill, but "lo! he speaketh boldly? †"

Not long before his crucifixion, being inform'd of the sickness of Lazarus, who lived about two miles from Jerusalem; he said unto his disciples, "let us go into "Judea again. ‡" they, being in pain for themselves as well as him, strove to dissuade him from so dangerous an expedition: "Lord, of late the Jews sought to "stone thee, and goest thou thither "again?" And when he had told them plainly that Lazarus was dead, still persisting in his resolution to pursue his journey; "nevertheless (says he) let us go unto him," tho' he be really dead: then

Q said

* John vii. 14.

† ver. 25.

‡ John xi. 7:

said Thomas to his fellow-disciples, "let
" us also go, that we may die with him:"
expecting inevitable death if they went so
near Jerusalem, and exposed themselves so
openly to the power and malice of those
who sought their lives.

Upon the road to Jerusalem "as Jesus
"went before them," and they, amaz'd and
trembling, followed him*; amaz'd that he
should thus expose himself to that danger
which before he seem'd to decline, by retir-
ing "to a city called Ephraim near the
"wilderness;" and anxious too upon their
own account, for the danger that threatened
them, as being his disciples: he calmly
and minutely describes the painful and
ignominious sufferings reserv'd for him, and
which were now just approaching: "Be-
"hold, (says he) we go up to Jerusalem;
"and the Son of man shall be betrayed to
"the chief-priests and the scribes; and
"they shall condemn him to death, and
"shall deliver him to the gentiles,"
meaning the Romans, (for the Jews were
then

* Mark x. 32.

then deprived of the power of putting any one to death,) "to the gentiles shall they
" deliver him, to mock, and to scourge,
" and to crucify him, and the third day he
" shall rise again." This, however, did not restrain him from making his entry into that metropolis, in a more public, more solemn, and, consequently, more invidious manner than he had ever done before; nor from going, the next day, into the Temple of God, where, with majestic resolution, "he cast out all them that sold and bought" in that sacred place, "overthrew the tables
" of the money changers, and the seats of
" them that sold doves: and the blind and
" the lame came to him in the temple,
" and he healed them*" there, in the presence of the chief-priests and scribes.

And tho', in the evening, it was his custom to retire to Bethany, and lodge there; yet, in the morning, he return'd into the city, confronted, reprov'd and inveigh'd against the haughty, hypocritical

Q 2

Pha-

* Matt. xxi.

Pharisees, and continued to make his public appearance, till he was betray'd and seiz'd.

Just before his seizure, he made a long speech to his disciples, which takes up three whole chapters in St John's gospel; taking leave of them in the most compos'd and solemn manner; and giving them instructions how to behave, and what comforts and assistances they might hope to receive, when he was departed from them.

As soon as he had finished this endearing exhortation, and, by a most pathetic and affectionate prayer, (recorded by the same evangelist *) had recommended himself, his disciples, and all future believers, to his father's gracious protection: he went over the brook Cedron to the garden of Gethsemane, expecting there the coming of the traitor Judas, "who knew the place, " for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with " his disciples."

When that perfidious wretch was now arriv'd, "bringing with him a band of men " and officers (in the dusk of the evening) " with

* John xvii.

“ with lanthorns, and torches, and weapons:” Jesus, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth; and, without the least emotion, told them that he was the person whom they wanted to apprehend; and calmly suffered them to put their cruel design in execution: not that he wanted power to escape their hands; since his first answer to them was attended with such divine majesty and force, as to strike them all backwards down to the ground.

All his solicitude was to preserve his followers. “ If ye seek me (and me only) let these go their way. * ”

When brought before the tribunal of the Sanhedrim, and afterwards that of the Roman proconsul; with equal resolution and constancy of mind he declared who he was; and when they could not find sufficient evidence against him, he gave them an opportunity of proving what they wanted to prove, by his own voluntary confession. †

Q 3

Thus

* John xviii. 7.

† Luke xxii. 71.

Thus firm and unshaken was our blessed Saviour's fortitude amidst the preparatives to that bitter cup which he was to drink for the sins of the world !

And when the gloomy hour was now come ; when, in the garden, he labour'd under agonies infinitely more intense than human nature ever felt : tho' then he seem'd to express some reluctance, and display'd a quick sensibility of suffering, (which, however, is consistent with the most perfect fortitude) yet was this reluctance attended with calm and entire submission to his Father's will.

Even amidst the agonizing tortures of crucifixion, his mind continued firm and serene. Witness the tender concern he express'd for the Blessed Virgin, in recommending her to the care of his favourite disciple, St. John ; the charitable intercession he made for those who crucified him ; the gracious comfort he administer'd to the penitent malefactor.

And " knowing that all things (relating to his life here upon earth) " were now
" accom-

“accomplished,” except one prophecy in the Psalmist—“They gave me vinegar to drink;*” that the scripture might be fulfilled, he said, “I thirst. †” And having receiv’d the draught (which the Roman soldiers, who were utter strangers to that prophecy, gave him) “it is finish’d,” said he; my work on earth is finished; and he bow’d his head, and immediately expir’d!

Thus firm and persevering was his fortitude even to the last! triumphant even in death!

Let this enlivening pattern animate our spirits, and give strength to our resolution amidst all dangers and all temptations.

Let this encourage and support us when assaulted with sickness, grief, or pain.

Let this render us superior to all the blandishments of sensual pleasure, and all the shocks of adversity: steady in the pursuit of our duty, tho’ attended with inconvenience, ridicule, or censure: unmoved

Q 4

and

* Pf. lxix. 21.

† John xix. 28.

and unseduced, either by rude opposition, or soft allurements: determin'd to hold fast our integrity, tho' all the advantages of the present life should be taken from us: nay, even tho' sure to be exposed to the utmost violence of persecution. "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him," (the prospect of that majesty, power, and glory which he, in his human nature, was to be invested with, as the reward of his sufferings here below) "endured the cross, despising the shame, and" (having loosed the bands of death, and triumphantly ascended up into heaven) "is set down at the right hand of the throne of God, where he ever liveth, to make intercession for us!"

To Him, therefore, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be ascrib'd all honour, &c.

S E R.

SERMON XIV.

(Preach'd in the year 1747.)

Against prophane and habitual
SWEARING.

JAM. v. 12.

Above all things, my brethren, swear not.

THE abominable practice of common and prophane swearing, of using the name of the most high God vainly and irreverently, and of calling down his vengeance on themselves, as well as others, upon every trifling provocation, nay, frequently upon no provocation at all, may be ranged amongst the crying sins of this land.

All the methods hitherto applied have not been able to restrain a habit so opposite to the laws, both of God and man; as well as to the dictates of good sense,
and

and good manners. All the repeated admonitions against it, both from the pulpit and the press, tho' they could not fail of convincing the wretches of their guilt and folly, have, however, been disregarded or forgot; and all the conviction thence arising, like the transient impression of a dream, has vanished away; whilst they still persist in the odious and criminal practice, without any visible sense of shame, remorse, or danger! nay, perhaps, the habit is become so deep-rooted and inveterate, that they scarce are sensible when they repeat the crime.

With a view, therefore, of deterring those by punishments whom the milder arts of exhortation could have no effect upon, no lasting effect; two acts of parliament were made, * in the last century, to restrain and reform, if possible, a vice so scandalous and so prevailing.

What impression these might make, when first enacted, it is not in our power to determine. But what poor remains of
any

* 21 Jac. I. 6-7 Will. and Mary.

any good impressi^on are now left, we cannot but, with grief, observe !

It is, indeed, pretended that a great reformation is made, in this particular, amongst all the politer part of the world: that it is now no longer fashionable, but quite the reverse: that it is chiefly confin'd to those in the camp and the navy; and that, exclusive of these, scarce any but the very dregs of the people are tainted with it.

'Tis ardently to be wish'd that the assertion were true, and would ever continue so ! It would give the highest pleasure to every one who has a proper zeal for the interest of religion, the salvation of souls, or the good of his country ! but, at the same time, 'tis greatly to be fear'd that the case is deplorably otherwise; and that, in spite of all the endeavours hitherto applied, this audacious crime is still predominant amongst us.

That this is the sentiment of the legislature appears from an act of parliament, still severer than the former ones, establish'd

in

in the present session, in order to stop its progress ; and try whether the dread of penalties will not prevail, where the sense of duty has lost all its power and influence.

'Tis charitably to be hoped that the application falls upon few or none that are here present ; but lest, thro' forgetfulness of duty, thro' rashness and inattention, or the prevailing force of sinful example, any should be drawn to so vicious a custom : I shall endeavour briefly to display the heinousness and folly of it, and the pernicious consequences 'tis attended with both in respect of this life, and the next.

1. Let us consider it as extremely prejudicial to society.

Among all the civilized nations of the world, heathen as well as christian, the nature of an oath has ever been esteemed sacred and inviolable, as being applied to determine all important disputes. " An
" oath for confirmation (says the apostle)
" is

“ is an end of all strife. *” On this depends the decision of property, the preservation of peace, and the security of government. This solemn appeal to the God of all truth must be considered as the strongest assurance of sincerity, and the strongest obligation upon the conscience of him who makes it. An appeal which makes God himself a party ; a witness to the truth asserted, and an avenger of all perjury and falsehood. An act, so venerable and important in itself, should never be prophan’d by common, needless or irreverent use.

“ Familiarity (says the proverb) breeds contempt.” And certainly the too familiar use of oaths must serve to lessen, if not remove, that reverence, and awful regard which ought ever to attend them. How greatly must they lose in their dignity and weight, when prostituted to the most trifling purposes, and even to no purposes at all !

What

* Heb. vi. 16.

What stress can be laid upon the oath of that man who habitually applies it with so much thoughtlessness and contemptuous freedom ! who seems solicitous to convince the world that he has no fear of God before his eyes ! For how can the fear of God be ever imagin'd to reside in the breast of that man who has the impious assurance to violate his holy name ; to fly in the face of his positive command, and to dare the terrors of his vengeance ?

One step farther introduces the guilt of cool, deliberate perjury. For tho' it would be a severe assertion to affirm, and a breach of charity to think, that every common swearer would fear his conscience to such a degree as to become a perjur'd villain ; 'tis however but natural to suppose that he, who thus habitually trifles with an oath, can have no very deep sense of its obligation.

And on how precarious a footing must reputation, property, and life itself stand, upon this supposition !

'Tis a part of the character of one of the brightest ornaments of learning which this,

or

or any other, nation ever had ; one of noble extraction too,* equally admir'd for his surprising strength of genius, and his proper application of it ; that he never once mention'd the name of God without making a grand and solemn pause, to testify his profound veneration for that adorable name which the common swearer has the insolence to prophane with his unhallow'd lips almost every hour ! A practice—not only most audaciously impious with regard to our Creator, but also a rude violation of decency and good-manners with regard to our fellow-creatures. For how harsh and grating must be the sound to the ears of every sincere christian ; every one who retains the least sense of piety, or the least zeal for the honour of God ! What strong uneasiness must it give him to hear that sacred name, which all the host of heaven, with the utmost humility, adore, treated with scandalous indecency by those who profess and call themselves christians, at the same time !

A

* Hon. Mr. Boyle.

A practice—detrimental also to the character of him who indulges it; since instead of strengthening the credit of his assertions, which (we must imagine) is what he aims at; 'tis one of the surest methods he can take to weaken and destroy it. He not only raises a violent suspicion in those who hear him; but demonstrates too that he really suspects his own credit; conscious to himself that his bare word will not be taken, but requires to be enforced with a vain and shocking imprecation.

Or must we consider the oaths of the common swearer as mere expletives, attended with no meaning, and answering no other purpose than to fill up the vacancies of speech? Under this view, which is far the most favourable we can place it in, it conveys a keen reflexion on the abilities of the speaker, whose language is so miserably barren; and a still keener reproach to his understanding, as being so stupid as to be guilty, habitually guilty, of a crime which answers no end, and to which he can have no inducement.

Every other species of guilt has, at least, some excuse to plead, how weak and insufficient soever that excuse may be; such as the frailty of human nature in general; the particular propensities of particular constitutions; the appearance, the flattering appearance of interest or pleasure, those powerful engines of our spiritual adversary: but nothing of this nature can be pleaded in extenuation of this odious custom, a custom no less foolish than impious and fatal; gratifying no appetite; indulging no natural inclination; producing no profit, nor even the shadow of profit. So that the wretch, who habituates himself to it, may be said to sin, merely for the sake of sinning; to disobey, affront, and dishonour his God, out of mere wantonness; and, in the most literal sense of the prophet's expression, "to sell his soul for nought."

A crime for which no apology can be made, but such as serves to expose, in the most glaring light, at once, the heinousness and folly of it.

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For

For what can the habitual swearer say in extenuation of his guilt? he will say, perhaps, he is betray'd into it by the violence of ungovern'd passion. Allow we this; yet certainly one fault can by no means extenuate another, tho' it may produce it.

Is he led by the force of example? the example he himself allows to be a vicious one, and is, generally, forward enough to condemn himself for being so thoughtless, imprudent and wicked as to copy after it.

Does he think to storm the attention, and extort the assent of those whom he wants to convince? were he even to torture his invention, he could not invent a surer method of rendering himself insignificant, despicable, and ridiculous.

Or is it meant to give an air of firmness and fortitude? If true courage were to consist in presumptuously affronting our Maker; in wantonly prophaning his tremendous name; in loudly calling down his dreadful vengeance: if 'tis a branch of heroism to violate

violate the laws of our Creator, and our country ; to wound the ears of our fellow-christians, and to raise, at once, their indignation, their horror, and their pity : then is the habitual swearer entitled to it ; if not, the pretence is no less vain than the practice is detestable.

Or will he say (what very often is said) “ ’tis an ugly habit he has got ; he means
“ no harm by it, and does not so much
“ as know when he repeats it :” if so, his case is wretched indeed ! but sure the long continuance, and frequent repetition of a crime, can never excuse or extenuate the guilt of it, but quite the reverse.

As, therefore, we would promote the cause of religion ; the glory of God ; the well-being and happiness of society ; we should strive, with all our power, to discountenance so shocking and dangerous a practice ; and to support the dignity of so solemn an appeal to the most High. Retaining in our own minds that awful impression which should ever attend the bare mention of the Supreme Being ; and

endeavouring, both by example, exhortation, and reproof, to fix it in the minds of those who seem to have shook it off: to rescue (as far as we are able) that sacred and adorable name from the audacious and impious irreverence with which it is treated by the dissolute, the thoughtless and the vain.

Should these gentle methods prove unsuccessful, the act abovementioned proposes another way of restraining those whom no religious, moral, or social consideration can restrain; and that, by inflicting penalties.

'Tis indeed a most amazing circumstance, that the dread of a small forfeiture should have greater weight with some than the sense of duty, the fear of God's displeasure, the uneasiness they give to others, and the hazard of their own immortal souls! this, in a christian country, is no less surprizing than scandalous and reproachful. But that the case is really so—'tis obvious and melancholy to observe.

How

How eagerly, therefore, should we wish that this law may be put in strict execution ! that, where advice and reproof fail, every one may exert a christian resolution, and prosecute those who thus presumptuously offend ! that an ardent zeal for the divine honour may remove all our indolence, and supersede that principle which is falsely called by the name of good-nature, and which, by inducing us to connive at other people's crimes, involves us in the guilt of them !

The character of an informer, indeed, is (generally speaking) held in the utmost abhorrence, and branded with disgrace and infamy.

And the reason of this is, because 'tis generally assumed by those who are actuated by the worst and basest principles, by malice, treachery, or sordid interest. But here the case is widely different. Informations of this sort cannot well be supposed to arise from ill-nature, pique, or prejudice ; but from an eager zeal for the honour of God, and kind compassion for

the souls of men. Nor yet from any motive of self-interest, since all the forfeitures are allotted to the poor.

No one, therefore, needs to be ashamed of turning informer on such an occasion, let his character or station in life be what it will.

Much more pleasing, indeed, and happy would it be, if men would suffer themselves to be prevail'd upon by the softer arguments of religion, reason, and common decency, and not force so disagreeable a task on those who (tho', perhaps, for such a prosecution, they may be esteem'd their enemies) shew a much greater regard for them, than they do for themselves.

Need I mention—that in order to be qualified thus to reprove, and (if necessity require) thus to prosecute others, we ourselves should be quite guiltless? otherwise all our weight and authority is lost; and they will certainly say unto us that proverb, “physician, heal thyself.”

This more particularly concerns those who are placed in any superior rank, whether

ther as magistrates, parents, or masters of families. For with what face can they pretend to punish or reprove others, when they themselves are guilty of the same crime? or how will they teach them to unlearn that prophane habit which, perhaps, they learn'd originally at their lips?

May these reflections have a proper influence, and inspire us with a due regard and reverence for that awful name which the most vain and profligate swearer will, one day, be forc'd to repeat in a quite different tone, and with a quite different air!

That whenever distress or anguish comes upon us, or an horrible dread overwhelms our spirits; in the hour of death and in the day of judgment, when that sacred name will universally be invoked with trembling eagerness, and in the humblest and warmest strains of adoration: the Lord of heaven and earth, whose holy name and word we thus revere, may accept

our petitions when we call upon him ;
may pity our weakness, pardon all our in-
voluntary failings, and embrace us with
the arms of his mercy, thro' the merits
of Jesus Christ, our mediator and re-
deemer ;

To whom, &c.

SER-

SERMON XV.

CAUTIONS against EVIL COMPANY,
and LOOSE WRITINGS.

I COR. XV. 33.

Evil communications corrupt good manners.

TIS a common and just observation, that examples have a more prevailing influence over our conduct, than precepts and instructions have: and that the generality of mankind are more eager to put in practice what they see done, than what they are told 'tis their duty to do.

And 'tis equally obvious to observe, that vicious examples more effectually engage our imitation, and make a deeper and more lasting impression than those of piety and virtue.

The

The various artifices which the abandoned part of the world apply, in order to make others as wicked as themselves, too frequently succeed, in one shape or other, and seduce the unwary, the thoughtless and unexperienced from the paths of virtue; debauch, at once, their principles and their practice; teach them to disregard and reject all the dictates of religion, modesty, and shame; till, at last, they are too far gone to think of retreating, being fast bound in the chains of sensuality and sin, precipitately and blindly hurried on to ruin and destruction!

And how many deplorable instances have we known and seen of those who, tho' trained up with the strictest care, and tinctur'd with the most useful instructions, have yet, thro' an unhappy choice of companions, lost their innocence; have made shipwreck, at once, of their own, and their parents happiness; and turn'd profelytes to those debaucheries which, before, they were not only strangers to, but had the strongest antipathy against!

For

For tho' at first, perhaps, we may act with some reserve ; tho' natural modesty, and the impressions of a pious education, may, for a while, guard our integrity, and keep our principles untainted ; tho', upon our first introduction, the reluctances of conscience may deter us from compliance : yet, these reluctances will soon be lull'd asleep ; the impressions of piety and virtue will insensibly wear off ; our aversion to vice and immorality dwindle away ; till, at last, with pleasure and greediness we commit those daring enormities, the very mention of which would, before, have chill'd our blood, and given us deep uneasiness.

To this fatal cause we may impute the alarming progress which irreligion and infidelity have made, and still make, in this licentious age.

'Tis now become almost fashionable, and seems to be regarded, by the gay and thoughtless, as a necessary ingredient of modern politeness—to banter every thing that is sacred or serious ; and, consequently,

ly, all those who express any reverence or regard for objects of this nature.

They who, by reason of unguarded youth, shallowness of understanding, weakness of resolution, or a false and vicious modesty, have not as yet learned to bear the shock of ridicule, easily receive the fatal impression; are jeer'd, at once, out of their reason, and their religion; and choosing rather to be fashionably wicked, than unpolitely innocent, "follow a multitude to (think, and say, and) do evil. *"

To this too we may ascribe most of the thefts, robberies and murders, which fill so many paragraphs in our public papers. This the dying criminals themselves confess, when, in pathetic terms, they entreat the witnesses of their execution to take warning by them, and anxiously to avoid evil company, the source of all their wickedness, and the cause of their untimely and ignominious death!

Hence too are deriv'd the debaucheries of drunkenness and riotous intemperance. All intemperance is contrary to nature.

Na-

Nature, we know, is satisfied with a little. And whatever fatiates or overcharges must be disagreeable and offensive to it. Whence we may infer, that no one, at first however, can be fond of drinking to excess, merely for the sake of drinking to excess: no, 'tis the bewitching power of persuasion and example that first introduces the thirsty disposition, and an impatient eagerness to indulge it: this disposition gradually rises to a confirmed habit; the pernicious consequences of this habit, and the extreme difficulty of subduing it, 'tis needless to point out.

Thus do the vicious practices of those we associate with stain and corrupt our morals, attract and engage our close imitation, and leave impressions scarce ever to be erased!

And here we may observe, with concern and grief observe, that they who have the greatest share of (what we call) good-nature, lie most exposed to assaults of this kind, and too frequently fall easy victims to the artifices and allurements of those

those who go about seeking whom they may seduce ! for good-nature, or an easy, credulous and complying temper, how amiable soever it may appear to others, generally, in both sexes, proves fatal to the possessor, when not attended with a due share of resolution and prudence to poise and restrain it.

If we examine the inducements to these fatal compliances, we shall find them extremely weak and trifling.

The unguarded part of mankind close in with the extravagant and vicious conduct, with the loose and irreligious notions of others, on some such motives as these :

1. Either to avoid the imputation of singularity :
2. Or thro' fear of being thought rude and ill-manner'd :
3. Or to shun the contemptuous reproaches and insults of those whose behaviour and principles they are far from approving.

1. To

1. To affect singularity, indeed, in the common actions of life; and to refuse compliance in things that are absolutely indifferent, betrays an unusual share of self-conceit, and is both indecent and ridiculous. But to be singularly virtuous, sober, chaste, devout, &c. this, one would imagine, no christian should ever be ashamed of. We are not wont to be ashamed of being thought singularly learned, prudent, wealthy, &c. but, on the contrary, are apt to be exalted with the distinction arising from such a singularity. Why then should we blush for being singular in the far more valuable qualifications of piety and virtue?

2. But if we refuse doing as others do, we shall unavoidably be censur'd as rude and ill-manner'd, unfociable and precise.

And it must needs be a piece of extraordinary good-manners, the very height of complaisance, tamely to submit to every one's importunity; to thwart our own inclination, in order to gratify that of other people;

people ; to sacrifice our innocence, our health, our peace of conscience, to the fantastic and criminal humours of every wild, unthinking wretch, merely to avoid the character of morose, unpolite, superstitious, &c. and what other terms of contempt the abandon'd part of mankind are pleas'd to bestow on those who express a due regard for the sacred rules of their religion : terms, that are bestow'd by none but those whose very commendation and applause would be our greatest reproach and scandal : nay, whose reproach and scandal is our highest commendation and applause. To be censur'd and revil'd by wretches of this stamp implies a commendation free from the least mixture or suspicion of flattery, and, consequently, the highest we can possibly receive.

And what can they really say of us ? They may say, indeed, that our regard for virtue and religion is firm and inflexible : —That we have not learn'd to silence and suppress the dictates of conscience, nor to throw off the restraints of modesty :—That

we

we are unwilling to sacrifice our reason to humour, folly, and madness; or the dignity of our nature to brutal indulgences:—that we believe (and act as tho' we believed) that God created us for much nobler ends than to gratify our wild, inordinate passions, or to be slaves to sensual appetite:—that we are resolute, steady and unbiass'd in adhering to our duty:—that we behave in this world, as if we had not drown'd or stifled the thoughts and expectations of a future one.

And if this be their censure, may we live and die under the weight of it, without the least variation in our character!

The frivolousness of these inducements will appear in a still more glaring light, if we consider how common prudence would direct us to act, if the case were merely of a temporal nature. Our conduct would then be extremely different, and our compliance not so extremely easy.

Who would be willing to contract a disease, merely out of conformity to a sick friend; or even to come into his presence,

S

if

if the distemper were contagious, or suspected to be so? and where is the man (let his pretensions to friendships be never so warm and zealous) who will be fond of plunging himself into the depth and wretchedness of poverty, merely because an acquaintance has been giddy and extravagant; or to shun the imputation of being singular, and void of complaisance?

Pursue we then the dictates of common prudence in an article of infinitely more importance than either the possession of riches, or the enjoyment of health.

Let us seriously reflect on the danger we expose ourselves to, in every step we make towards any sinful compliance; and in coming near those who will use all their industry and artfulness to debauch our morals, and then triumph in our ruin.

And as unexperienced youth is more particularly liable to be seduc'd: it greatly behoves all parents and guardians to keep a watchful eye over the conduct of those entrusted

entrusted to their care, and to observe what sort of companions they seem most fond of associating with ; and more especially at that critical period of life, when (as we say) they go out into the world : they may hence learn of how great importance it is to introduce them to the society of those who are blest with a sober, discreet and religious turn of mind ; and to restrain them from even the most distant correspondence with those who discover any symptoms of a different disposition.

An equal degree of caution must be applied with regard to the books they read, and seem most fond of reading.

'Tis not a wild or improbable supposition,—that as many young people have been debauch'd by vicious authors, as by vicious conversation.

The original depravity of our nature gives us, in our younger years, a disrelish for all books of piety and religion ; and too violent a fondness for those which, under the pretence of harmless amusement,

convey poison to the mind; or, at least, induce us to regard all sacred and serious subjects, as insupportably dull and tiresome.

Here then 'tis the part of parents and guardians to interpose; to apply all the arts of persuasion and allurements, and, upon occasion, the sterner dictates of authority, in recommending the perusal of such books as may not only amuse, but edify the mind; enriching it with useful and important truths; inspiring proper notions of our duty to God, our fellow-creatures, and ourselves; explaining the nature of true happiness, and pointing out the paths that lead to the enjoyment of it.

Regard for their character and reputation in the world may restrain some (particularly those of the tender sex) from frequenting such company, and cultivating such acquaintance, as may weaken or endanger it. This, where the love and fear of God are not sufficiently rooted, may

may possibly prevail more than any other consideration whatsoever.

But the perusal of improper books is attended with no such restraint. This is a vicious pleasure which they may indulge themselves in, when retir'd beyond the reach of all observation except that of their creator, and him they are taking one of the surest methods to exclude the remembrance of ! lavishing those hours which might be much better employ'd : contracting a disrelish, if not an aversion, to all such books as are of a serious and self-denying tendency ; together with the hazard of imbibing such vain notions as may prove fatal to their happiness both in this life and the next !

To prevent a practice so imprudent and so dangerous ; the strictest care, and the most skilful address should be applied to induce them to read the word of God, and other volumes of piety and devotion, of which there is a plenteous variety in our language, displaying, in proper co-

lours, the vanity of this life's enjoyments; and recommending the beauty of holiness, with strength of argument, and elegance of style.

The reading these, with a due share of frequency and attention, will raise their minds above all the low, vain, and insinuating compositions of those who dictate only to the sensual passions; and will teach them to know themselves, their duty, and their happiness.

And how tedious and unpleasing soever this kind of reading may appear (and will naturally, at first, appear) to deprav'd nature: yet, by the grace of God, it will gradually become an entertaining and delightful task.

Nor is it necessary to exclude all books of mere amusement. This would be too severe. But then we must confine ourselves to those that are strictly innocent, and calculated, not to betray, but to promote the interests of morality and virtue. Always remembering that evil books, as
well

well as evil communications, powerfully contribute to "corrupt good manners."

That these reflections may leave a suitable impression ; may alarm our caution, and keep us ever upon our guard :

That our innocence may be proof against all the force of example and persuasion, unbiass'd by the one, and uneduc'd by the other ; and that our christian resolution may baffle all the ruder assaults of ridicule and reproach :

That we may ever be so religiously prudent as to shun the infection of evil company, and the writings of every irreligious, immoral and impure author ; and so charitably pious as to deter all others over whom we have any degree of influence :

And, lastly, that all our conduct being suited to the holy and abstemious rules of the gospel, we may taste the exquisite pleasures of a clear and unpolluted conscience in this world, and be admitted,

thro' the merits of our redeemer, to far
sublimier joys, in the world to come,

God, of his infinite mercy, grant,
thro' Christ our Lord !

Amen.

SER-

SERMON XVI.

On the difference of conduct in
temporal and spiritual pursuits.

LUKE xvi. 8.

*The children of this world are, in their
generation, wiser than the children of
light.*

THESE words are an inference
which our blessed Saviour draws
from a parable he had just been
repeating. The substance of the parable
is this : a rich man being inform'd and
convinc'd that his steward had abused the
trust reposed in him, summons him to ap-
pear and give in his accounts, as being
determin'd to employ him no longer in
that capacity. The steward, finding him-
self deprived of his present support, sets
his

his thoughts immediately to find out what method would best secure a future subsistence; "He could not dig, to beg he " was ashamed." A way more easy and less precarious, tho' not half so honest as either of the former, soon occurred; which was, to ingratiate himself with his lord's debtors, that when he should be destitute of a house, they might receive him into theirs. In pursuance of this resolution, he calls them together, and makes up his lord's accounts with them; but in so indulgent a manner, as must induce, and, in point of gratitude, oblige them to be serviceable to him, at a time when (he was conscious to himself) he should want their assistance. His lord, how highly soever he might be enraged at the treachery and injustice of his servant, could not but applaud the artfulness of his management, could not help commending him, in this respect, however, "because he had done " wisely"—had so well provided for his future support; had so prudently concerted his scheme of living comfortably hereafter; had

had so well projected the methods of accomplishing that scheme ; and had been so active in reducing those methods into immediate practice.

“ For (says our blessed Lord) the children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light.” As if he had said, they whose minds are fix’d on this life’s advantages only, are more solicitous to secure their imagin’d interest, than the children of light are to secure theirs : are more eager and industrious in the pursuit of sublunary enjoyments, tho’ trifling, vain and delusive, than they who have been enlightned by revelation, who have been taught to fix their hopes on far more deserving objects—are in the pursuit of their true happiness.

Nay, (what is still more deplorable, as well as more surprizing) they who are here called “ the children of light ;” they whom providence has indulged with the happiness of a christian education ; who are firmly persuaded of the certainty of a future state, and cannot avoid being sensible,

fible, that a zealous, unbiass'd and unwearied pursuit will alone secure the rewards of that state; that negligence and remissness will involve us in all the miseries of it, even in eternal ruin: yet they ('tis to be fear'd) are often more anxious to obtain the low, transient, and unsatisfying enjoyments of this world, than the sublime, unfading glories of the next!

Eternal happiness, indeed, is universally consider'd as our noblest and supreme end. We all of us make it the object of our warmest wishes, how cold soever we may be in the practice of those duties which alone can entitle us to it.

Even they who are the greatest slaves to this present world—desire, and hope to enjoy, the pleasures of the next.

To desire happiness, indeed, is essential to our nature; a principle born with us, and never to be extinguished. But as barely desiring will, by no means, entitle us to what we desire, with regard to the present world; so neither will it, with regard to the next.

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Industry, labour, intense application are required in order to obtain the advantages of this world, for those who have them not already ; and some industry, some application must be exerted in order to secure them when obtain'd.

And considering the immense disproportion betwixt the mean, imperfect satisfactions of this life, and those inconceivable joys which heaven will impart ; how can we be so vain to hope, so unreasonable to expect, that a lower degree of application will serve to secure those celestial treasures, in comparison of which, the most desirable enjoyments of this world deserve not to be mention'd !

Which of these two, indeed, has the juster claim to our earnest pursuit—no christian of common sense can be at a loss to determine.

And should the question be put to one of almost the meanest capacity, it would, no doubt, be resented as an unpardonable insult upon his understanding.

Yet

Yet alas! whatever, our inward sentiments may be, if we survey the actions and pursuits of even the generality of christians, one would imagine that their notions were entirely opposite.

For what eagerness of industry do we exert, what restless fatigue are we at, to procure the advantages of the present life? how artful are most of us in forming our schemes, and how diligent in the execution of them? overjoy'd to meet with any incident or opportunity favourable to our designs, and anxiously careful to improve it to the best advantage.

On the other hand, in pursuing our eternal interest, how cold and languid do we appear, how thoughtless and unconcern'd, how negligent and slothful! how faint are our endeavours, and how frail our resolutions!

Insomuch, that were any of us to be as indolent and remiss in our temporal concerns, as we too frequently are with regard to our spiritual; we should be look'd
upon

upon as void of common sense, and meet with universal contempt.

That the common behaviour of christians justifies this melancholy observation will too plainly appear from the following instances.

As christians, we are all of us entitled to an inheritance in the kingdom of heaven. By disobedience, and a wilful or thoughtless violation of our baptismal covenant, that title becomes forfeited. Yet even then, thro' the mercy and indulgence of our God, we are allow'd the privilege of redeeming it by a seasonable and sincere repentance.—Disobedient and sinful alas ! we all are ! and yet, instead of being earnest and industrious in applying the gracious privilege, and improving it to the best advantage ; too many of us neglect and disregard it, and put off our repentance from day to day !

But, should any of us, thro' misconduct, forfeit our claim to a temporal inheritance, and should we have an equal opportunity of retrieving the false step :
would

would not even the most indolent of us, with eagerness, embrace, and with industry improve it? no doubt we should, not only for the sake of interest, but to shun the imputation of being most egregiously remiss, careless and stupid.

Thus too, when our constitution feels the first approaches of a distemper; when health, and all the pleasures which attend on health, are in manifest danger of being lost: how solicitous are we then to apply an immediate remedy, and to secure so valuable a blessing!

And what adds to our caution, in this respect, is the consciousness we lie under—that the longer we neglect the disease, the deeper root it takes.

Sin is to the soul what distempers are to the body. And, like them too, the longer 'tis indulg'd, the more obstinate it grows, and more difficult to be subdued.

'Tis greatly to be wish'd that we were all of us as careful to prevent, and as anxious to remove, the one as the other:

but, at the same time, 'tis greatly to be fear'd that how prudent soever we can be, with regard to our temporal health; with regard to our spiritual, we are quite the reverse!

The case is much the same in respect of our devotional performances.

To worship the Lord in his holy temple; there to confess our sins unto him; to implore his gracious forgiveness; to adore and magnify his sacred name for all the various instances of his mercy and goodness towards us—we cannot but allow to be, not only our duty, but a vast, unspeakable advantage also. Every convenient opportunity, therefore, of this kind we should look upon as a great happiness, and which every sincere christian should be always ready and eager to embrace.

And is it not with eagerness embrac'd?
Too often alas! the most trifling engagement in the concerns, or even the diversions, of this life administers an excuse, and outrivals, at once, our obvious duty,

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and our sublimest interest. And yet (surprizing as it is) we are, all the while, ready to acknowledge, that except the Lord gives a blessing to our endeavours, " 'tis but lost labour that we haste to rise " up early, and so late take rest, and eat " the bread of carefulness;" since, without his concurrence, all our pains will be fruitless, and all our schemes abortive. And unless we are duly careful to worship him in public as well as private; to recommend ourselves and our affairs to his providential care; to implore his gracious assistance in all we undertake; what room have we to expect his blessing?

Should an opportunity equally conducive to our temporal interest present itself, should we then be equally indifferent? Would every trifling difficulty hinder our attendance? Would distance of place detain, or even storms and tempests deter us? To be convinc'd of the contrary, propose but the slightest temporal advantage to those unthinking wretches who absent themselves from the house of God; propose

pose almost the meanest present reward, and all their objections and excuses will immediately be silenced, tho' the motives above mentioned would have no influence.

The last instance I shall mention is peculiar to parents.

'Tis the acknowledged duty of all those who have children, to endeavour (as far as in them lies) to provide for them. To provide not only for their well-being in this world, but also their happiness in the next. Remissness in the first of these articles is universally esteem'd not only imprudent, but even unnatural and brutish: and certainly it is so. But how much more unnatural and cruel is it to neglect their better part, their souls?

This, indeed, is a negligence which (tis to be hoped) few parents are guilty of in a strict and absolute sense.

But how many are more solicitous about their temporal than their eternal interest! how many take more pains in adorning their bodies, than in cultivating their souls!

in striving to procure them the conveniences and superfluities of this life, than in preparing them for the glories of the next !

I shall not now examine how very imprudent such a conduct is with regard to the parents themselves : with regard to their children—'tis not only imprudent, but barbarous and cruel to the last degree.

For certainly, to instruct them early in the principles of religion ; to inspire their tender minds with a lively sense of their duty ; to teach them to despise this world and to fix their desires on a better, is the only solid foundation of present, as well as future happiness.

Whatever, therefore, their outward circumstances may be, rich or poor, noble or mean ; a pious education is the best dowry a parent can give a child, and such as the poorest parent may give. But if neglected in this particular, they are exposed to the utmost hazard of being vain, useless and unhappy in this world,

and unspeakably miserable in the world to come.

In order, therefore, to avoid a conduct so preposterous, absurd and fatal; let us be ever mindful,—that the present life is only a short introduction to another: that since we are but strangers and sojourners here upon earth, it would be the height of madness to behave as if this were to be our abiding-place; 'tis just as if upon a journey of the utmost importance, we should, on purpose, wander out of our way, without once thinking on our journey's end.

Our blessed Saviour has enjoin'd us
“ first (and principally) to seek the king-
“ dom of God, and his righteousness,
“ and all the necessities of life shall be
“ added unto us.*” Let us not then,
by our behaviour, seem to invert his mean-
ing, to understand his words in a quite op-
posite sense; as if he had said—“ seek
“ ye first the riches, honours, and plea-
“ sures of this life, and the kingdom of
“ God shall be superadded.”

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* Matt. vi. 33.

I need not point out the glaring absurdity of such a construction, nor how monstrous that conduct is which comes up to it.

Be it our care, therefore, amidst all the various engagements of this life, chiefly to regard our sublimest interest, our supreme end, the salvation of our immortal souls.

And whilst we are anxiously careful about many things, let us not forget the "one thing needful." Let what will be neglected, let us upon no account neglect that: since if we do, let the prospect before us appear never so pleasing or gainful, and let us be never so successful in the pursuit; soon shall we find, to our cost find, that all our pleasure will end in remorse, and all our gain in ruin!

And what will it profit us, if we gain the whole world, whilst, at the same time, we lose our own souls, and, for a short-lived, imperfect satisfaction, forfeit eternal happiness, and plunge ourselves into eternal misery?

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The time will come when our notions of things will entirely be changed from what they now are; when we shall look down with contempt on this world, and its highest enjoyments, and be surpris'd at ourselves for having been so inconsiderate and stupid as to pursue them with so much eagerness, and suffer them so deeply to engage our thoughts and desires!

The time will come when an enquiry will be made, not how much wealth we have treasur'd up; not how large an extent of land we have possess'd; not what titles and honours we have been distinguish'd with here below; but what progress we have made in the duties of religion.

When one hour that has been spent in the offices of piety and devotion, in cultivating the soul, and preparing it for future bliss; when one single hour, thus spent, will be of more advantage, and yield us higher satisfaction, than whole years that have been spent in the mean and low pursuits of what this world affords.

Not but that our temporal affairs ought to have a proper share of our attendance and regard. The being wise, with relation to our future state, does not require us to be fools, with relation to our present one. 'Tis certainly our duty to provide for both. But as we cannot be ignorant which ought to have the preference, let common prudence direct us to act accordingly.

And whatever we attempt, pursue, or bend our thoughts upon, tho' it may not directly promote, let it however nowise obstruct our eternal interest.

Let our very amusements be weigh'd in this balance. Let diversion, as well as business, be first innocent in itself, and, in the next place, innocently pursued; that is, at proper seasons, and within proper bounds. For how innocent soever they may be in themselves, an unseasonable or immoderate pursuit will invert their nature, and make them deeply criminal.

Induced by these reflexions let us wisely mix our future with our present interest;
ever

ever cautious to make the one duty subservient to the other.

And whilst the children of this world exert such unwearied industry in the pursuit of trifles; whilst they "walk in a vain shadow, and disquiet themselves in vain:" let us be, at least, equally industrious in the pursuit of those attainments which infinitely more deserve our industry, and will crown it, in the end, with happiness and glory.

That when death shall for ever separate us from this world, and this world's enjoyments: when all their wisdom will be found to be foolishness and vanity; and all their acquisitions emptiness, or worse than emptiness: we may approve ourselves to have been truly wise, even "wise unto salvation."

And to this end, let us be frequent and fervent in our addresses to God, humbly beseeching him that he would give us grace to direct all our inclinations and pursuits to proper objects, and to behave suitably to

to our christian profession, amidst all the various scenes of life !

That our thoughts and desires being raised above earthly enjoyments, and fix'd on those in heaven ; we may so pass thro' things temporal, as not, thro' indolence, or a mistaken pursuit, to lose the things eternal !

That being stedfast in faith, and joyful thro' hope of future bliss, we may so pass the waves of this busy, delusive, and insnaring world, as finally to arrive at the land of everlasting life, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord.

To whom, &c.

SER-

SERMON XVII.

On the mutual DUTIES of the
RICH and POOR.

PROV. xxii. 2.

*The rich and poor meet together : the Lord
is the maker of them all.*

THE manifest design of Solomon,
in drawing the observation before
us, was to remove and suppress
all animosities, disquietudes and heart-
burnings betwixt those of different ranks,
and to unite them in mutual love, and mu-
tual good offices : to inspire the rich with
sentiments of condescension, kindness and
beneficence ; the poor with willing sub-
mission, and calm contentment under their
present station : that the former may be

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compassionate, hospitable and generous ;
the latter may be ready to pay all proper
deference to those whom the divine pro-
vidence has placed above them.

“ The rich and poor (says he) meet to-
gether.” Insinuating that these different
stations are equally requisite to form and
support human society : that the rich and
poor are united together, as members of
the same community ; and tho', with re-
gard to outward circumstances, wide is
the difference, and great the inequality
betwixt them ; in many points however,
and points of great importance, they are
both upon the same level.

1. Thus, with regard to our nature and
origin, the highest cannot say to the low-
est, “ I am greater or better than thou.”

For, as to the body, how differently
soever it may be cloathed, whether dis-
grac'd with rags, or adorn'd with purple,
and fine linnen : the same composition
and wonderful structure, the same display
of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness
is conspicuous in each ! They are equally
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the workmanship of the most high. "All
"men (says the son of Sirach) are from
"the ground, and Adam was created of
"the earth. In much knowledge has the
"Lord divided them, and made their ways
"divers. *"

And in respect of our nobler part,
there is not the least inequality. The soul
which animates the poorest peasant is in
no degree inferior to that of the greatest
monarch. 'Tis equally endued with the
faculty of reason, and freedom of will;
'tis equally immortal, deriv'd from the
same divine original, and imprest with the
same image of God; 'tis equally capable
of future happiness, and claims an equal
title to it, thro' the merits of his blood who
died for all, and will save all who truly
believe in him, whether they be rich or
poor.

2. They may also be said to "meet to-
"gether" with regard to the mutual, ne-
cessary dependence upon each other, in the
common concerns of life.

For

* Ecclus xxxiii. 10.

For how strange soever the assertion may appear, that the rich are any-wise dependent on the poor; yet certainly they are dependent, and greatly so. The service and labour of the meaner sort is absolutely necessary for the continual support of those above them. "The king himself (says the wisest and wealthiest of kings) "is served from the field. *"

In short, the rich can no more subsist without the service and assistance of the poor, than the poor can without the protection, relief and bounty of the rich.

3. The meaning of the words is likewise extended, by some commentators, to those great, and frequently unexpected, revolutions in the affairs of this life, which serve to interchange these different situations; depressing some from riches to poverty, and exalting others from poverty to riches.

4. And in another sense they may, with strict propriety, be said to "meet together," as being equally the objects of God's providential

* Eccl. v. 9.

vidential and paternal care : sharing, without any distinction, the tender and affectionate regard of that supreme Being, “who respects not the rich more than the poor, for they are all of them the work of his hands.*”

Affluence of fortune, height of station, extent of power, &c. are no distinguishing symptoms of the divine favour : nor should the poor imagine themselves neglected or over-look'd by providence, how distressful soever their present situation may appear. The eyes of their creator behold all their sufferings ; and his goodness (if they behave with due resignation) will, if not remove, at least, mitigate those sufferings, and, in the end, abundantly reward the sufferers. “For the Lord (says the Psalmist) “is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.†”

In these and many other (tho' less material) articles, “the rich and poor meet together ;” partakers of the same nature ; members of the same community ;

and

* Job xxxiv. 19. † Ps. cxlv. 9.

and "heirs together of the same blessed
"hope of immortality."

The only difference then consists in the outward circumstances of this transient and precarious life. Nor is this difference to be consider'd as the result of blind or undesigning chance, but the wise allotment of divine providence; pointed out and determin'd by that overruling power, that unerring wisdom, which ordereth all things both in heaven and earth. "The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich, he bringeth down, and lifteth up. *" He who gave being to both rich and poor assign'd to each this difference of station. Without his concurrence, the most industrious and artful endeavours to improve our situation must drop to nothing. As, on the other hand, when no such endeavours are applied, they are advanced and enrich'd who had no great reason to expect so favourable a change.

Poverty, indeed, may sometimes be imputed to other causes; may be the mere effect,

* 1 Sam. ii. 7.

effect, and natural consequence, of indiscretion or perverseness; what the luxurious, the thoughtless, the idle and debauch'd bring upon themselves. But still, there are numbers in the world, who, tho' entirely free from any imprudences or impieties of this sort, are yet confin'd to a mean station, notwithstanding the utmost endeavours to advance their fortune, and the most flattering hopes of success: restrain'd, no doubt, by the wise providence of that God who best knows what condition of life is most proper for every one of us.

Unreasonable and imprudent, therefore, as well as impious must it be to murmur at the station which he allots us; since by so doing, we impeach infinite wisdom, complain of a dispensation which we cannot see the motives of, and which all our peevish impatience, instead of alleviating, will only aggravate.

This unequal distribution of this world's possessions, how partial soever it may seem in the eyes of envy or discontent, displays

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the wisdom, not the injustice, of providence, in many respects.

'Tis even necessary for the welfare of the whole community of mankind, with regard to the various services and employments requisite to the support and preservation of society.

" There are in a house (says the apostle) " not only vessels of honour, but also of " dishonour ; * " and these are no less necessary in their use than the others are.

" In the body (says the same sacred author) there are many members ; † " and unless those offices which are peculiar to the meaner parts, be duly and regularly executed, the superior and more honourable must be affected with great disorder. " So that the eye cannot say to the hand, " I have no need of thee ; nor yet the " head to the feet, I have no need of " you."

The case is the same in human society. Some members must preside and direct, others must serve and obey : which could never

* 2 Tim. ii. 20.

† 1 Cor. xii.

never be effected without a disproportion of circumstances, and difference of station, sufficient to claim respect, and support a proper influence on one hand, a due submission on the other ; and to create a mutual dependence betwixt the several orders and ranks of men.

Were it not so, all would be strife, disturbance and confusion ! whereas, by the present arrangement, by this unequal distribution of wealth, and, consequently, of power and influence ; the foundation of rivalship is remov'd, mutual dependence takes place, and the order of society is preserv'd and secur'd. The lower classes of mankind make no scruple of submitting to the higher, and, by such submission, claim their protection and relief.

Whilst they who are placed in loftier stations find it their duty, and even their interest, to guard, relieve, and support those, without whose assistance they themselves would be destitute and wretched amidst all their plenty.

Hence too both rich and poor derive an opportunity of exerting the virtues peculiar to their respective conditions: virtues, which, if all were upon the same level, there would be no room to exert.

The rich, the powerful, and honourable ones of the earth have an opportunity of displaying an extraordinary share of gratitude to their creator, for his distinguishing favours; as well as their condescension, compassion and beneficence to those below them.

The meaner sort have an equal opportunity of exercising their faith, and pious confidence in God; their patience, and calm submission to his will; and of expressing a due thankfulness for all the assistance they receive from those whom he has appointed his stewards of this world's possessions.

And the frequent sudden revolutions which happen to each state, lifting up those that were down, and depressing those that were highly exalted; may serve to

try our steadfastness on one hand, our resignation on the other; and convince us, at the same time, how vain it must be to think of being secure amidst prosperity, or irrecoverably sunk in the depths of adversity: when every state must be uncertain and precarious on the stage of this life, where nothing continues in one stay!

As thus both rich and poor are equally form'd by his hand who is the creator and preserver of all mankind: and as their different situation in life is thus fix'd and determin'd by the wise direction of his providence: let all, in their several stations and capacities, strive to discharge the duties which their station requires; and learn to consider that station as most proper and expedient for them.

Happy we may be (as happy, I mean, as this life will admit) in any station which providence allots us, tho' not in every station of our own carving.

We, by our own misconduct and folly, may throw ourselves into a state of deep

wretchedness. But the state which divine goodness appoints us, how mean soever it may be, can never make us miserable, unless, by impatience and reluctance, we make ourselves so.

If indeed the real happiness of man were "to consist (as our Lord expresses it) "in the abundance of the things which "he possesseth ;*" if every one were to be inwardly and assuredly happy in proportion to his outward circumstances: then would the meaner and more laborious part of mankind have strong reason to complain and be dissatisfied: then would a state of poverty be wretched and deplorable; and the distributions of providence might well seem partial and unjust.

But the case is far otherwise. In this respect too, the rich and poor may, with sufficient propriety, be said "to meet together."

Since happiness is not to be found in any condition here below; and the meanest situation may be attended with as much serenity

* Luke xii. 15.

serenity and peace of mind, and possibly a great deal more than the pinnacles of power, or the most luxuriant affluence of wealth.

However a very short period of time will throw down all distinctions of this sort. And since (as the apostle observes) “ we have here no continuing city, but “ seek one to come ; one which hath “ firm foundations, whose builder and “ maker is God : *” even they who enjoy the slenderest allowance of this world’s advantages have the utmost reason to “ possess their souls in much patience,” whilst, in humble submission to the will of their creator, they “ press forward toward the “ mark, for the prize of the high calling “ of God in Christ Jesus ; †” being less embarrassed and encumber’d in running the race that is set before them, and less liable to forget the prize they run for, than even the generality of those whom the splendor of wealth, eminence of state, or a constant succession of gay entertainments,

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may

* Heb. xiii. 14.

† Philip. iii. 14.

may too powerfully amuse and captivate ; may chain their affections down to the present life ; or too strongly divert their thoughts from that future state of bliss, where an impartial admittance may be gain'd by all who strive to qualify themselves for it, by the poor, as well as by the rich.

Where all the pious and devout, of all ranks and conditions, will enter together into the joy of their Lord ; will be crown'd with the sublime reward reserv'd for all those who have acted their part well, upon the stage of this life, and perform'd the duties peculiar to their station, whether that station be mean or exalted.

What those duties are which respectively belong to rich and poor, both with regard to God who is the maker of them all ; and to those of their fellow-creatures whose circumstances are different from their own ;—let us now enquire.

The peculiar duties which the great and wealthy owe to their creator are gratitude,

tude, humility, and an earnest endeavour to promote his glory.

To the first of these, besides the dictates of their own reason and conscience; they are almost perpetually excited by observing, all around them, those who are plac'd in a condition much inferior to their own; besides numberless objects of compassion, involv'd in deep distress, and earnestly imploring their charitable assistance.

Thankful they should likewise be for the power which God has given them, the desirable power of extending relief to their necessitous fellow-creatures, and of making numbers happy, without any detriment to their own fortune: the chief privilege this, and the chief happiness too which riches can bestow; attended with a present sincere pleasure, and laying a firm foundation of future bliss! whilst all other advantages and satisfactions, which 'tis in the power of riches to impart, "perish with the using."

To gratitude must be join'd humility, and a due sense of their dependent state:
always

always remembering that from God they derive whatever they enjoy, and must hereafter be accountable to him for the application of that wealth, power, influence, which he has been pleased to intrust them with: and, in consequence of this persuasion, striving to advance the honour of his name who so plenteously has poured his benefits upon them, by a life of exemplary virtue, adorn'd with sobriety and temperance, prudent œconomy, and regular devotion: since the pattern which they set will be eagerly followed by their inferiors, particularly those who are, in any degree, dependent on their bounty.

Let the poor learn from hence a calm and chearful submission to the wise disposal of their Maker, nor disdain the low station appointed for them by infinite goodness, as well as infinite wisdom.

Let not their spirits droop under their present hardships; since he who lays those hardships upon them will (if they are not wanting to themselves) hereafter exalt them

to the utmost height of happiness and glory.

And this future happiness may effectually be secur'd by an honest, decent, and devout behaviour in that state of life unto which it has pleased God to call them.

For poverty is no obstruction to the practice of virtue. The meanest of the sons of men may be as upright and sincere, as benevolent, regular and pious, as the most exalted of all his superiors, and can boast as good a title to the glorious inheritance of the saints in light.

The way to obtain this inheritance is as easy to them as to the greatest of their fellow-creatures; in some respects, much easier: since an exalted station is attended with anxieties, temptations, and dangers, such as a meaner one is not exposed to: since honours, riches, extent of power, and the like, are apt to fix the mind on these transitory possessions, and to exclude the thoughts of those enjoyments which are distant and unseen.

Besides;

Besides ; the hardships which wait on poverty, together with the coldness and contempt which generally fall to its share, must have a natural and strong tendency to wean our affections from this vain world, and to fix them on a better : exciting us to secure our only true interest, and to chuse that “ good part which shall not be “ taken away from us.”

Instead, therefore, of indulging any thoughts of fretfulness or discontent, or entertaining any harsh conceptions of providence ; the poorest christians have the utmost reason not only to be easy and resign'd, but even full of gratitude to that all-merciful Being who, tho' he has placed them in a low situation, has yet, with regard to their supreme happiness, placed them on a level with the very highest. And tho' their accommodations on the road of this life be coarse and mean, much more coarse than what many of their fellow-creatures are regaled with : yet, if they have a due respect to their journey's end, and take care not to wander
out

out of the way that leads thereto: the reception they will there meet with will more than overbalance all the fatigue they have sustain'd: and even that fatigue will contribute to improve the joys, and heighten the unsatiating pleasures which they will then be made partakers of, thro' the merits and mediation of their redeemer, Jesus Christ.

To whom, &c.

S E R-

SERMON XVIII.

On the same SUBJECT.

PROV. xxii. 2.

*The rich and poor meet together, the Lord
is the maker of them all.*

IT was observed in the last discourse, that the different stations in the present life are, for several wise and useful purposes, fixed and determined by divine providence.

That, without such a variety of outward circumstances, there would be no subordination ; without subordination there could be no government ; and without government there would be no harmony or due regulation preserved, but the world would be a scene of wild confusion ; of mutual strife, and mutual enmity ; all aspiring to rule, and none caring to obey !

That

That notwithstanding all the seeming inequality of this arrangement and distribution, yet, with regard to happiness, present as well as future, all are much upon the same level.

Our bounteous creator has made sufficient provision for the happiness of all his creatures. To imagine otherwise would be equally impious and absurd. But happiness depends not on our outward state; no more does misery. The most affluent fortune cannot, of itself, make the possessor happy; nor will the meanest situation make any one miserable, unless it be thro' his own fault.

And as "the rich and poor thus meet
"together," whilst God is equally the maker of them all; the disposer of their circumstances, as well as the author of their being: hence arises an obligation upon each rank to pay the tribute of love, reverence, and gratitude to their gracious creator; calmly and chearfully submitting to all the various allotments of his wise providence; fully satisfied with their
con-

condition; and striving to act, with decent propriety, the part which he has been pleased to assign them upon the stage of this life, whether the character they sustain be humble or exalted.

Nor let the honest and industrious poor (for the poverty of those who are not so falls not under our present consideration, as not being the allotment of divine providence, but drawn upon their own heads; the result of their own negligence, or the punishment of their own folly :) let not those, I say, whose poverty cannot be imputed to themselves, entertain the least distrustful thought of the divine goodness, nor reflect with envy on the more plenteous condition of others : but let them still trust in that God, who endues them with the power of being happy, in this life, as well as the next.

For contentment alone forms our present happiness ; and contented we may be, under any situation how mean soever.

Let no trials or hardships induce them to forget his gracious promises who, in
his

his sacred word, so frequently declares himself their friend, their patron, their protector, " casting all their care upon him who, with all the fondness of a father careth for them, and will either remove or supply their wants in this world, or, after a short perseverance, abundantly reward their patient submission, in the world to come.

Such are the respective duties which the wealthy and the poor owe to their creator.

Proceed we, therefore, to consider the mutual duties which these different stations owe to each other.

And as these various allotments are fix'd by divine providence : as they are calculated to promote the interests of society, and the mutual benefit of those who are thus differently situated : 'tis the obvious duty of the richer sort to behave with condescension, affability, and kindness towards the poor, as creatures of the same species, sprung from the same original, and endued with the same dignity of nature.

X

Such,

Such, however, is the insufferable haughtiness of some, with such contemptuous reserve do they behave towards those below them, as if they were beings inferior to themselves, not only in rank, but even in nature too.

And this insolent behaviour is chiefly assum'd by those who, from a low estate, have been raised and exalted above their fellows.

Forgetting, or seeming to forget, that the meanest of those on whom they look down with so much contempt, has a soul as noble as themselves, or even the greatest monarch: that external advantages and external ornaments are no sort of recommendation in the sight of that God who (as St. Peter observes) "is no respecter of persons; *" who "seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. †" The heart alone falls under his consideration: and if honesty and uprightness be found there, it sets the meanest

* Acts x. 34.

† 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

meanest upon a level with the highest; nay, infinitely above those great ones who want such qualifications; and that not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of all good men, all whose esteem is worth enjoying.

Haughty and disdainful usage is not only an inhuman rudeness to our fellow-creatures, but also a most audacious affront to our creator. “Who so mocketh the poor
“reproacheth his maker; *” reproacheth that God whose providence fix’d him in that state on which pride looks down with scorn and contempt.

Bare contempt, indeed, how grating soever it may prove, is yet much more tolerable than downright oppressive or tyrannical usage; whether by abusing or misapplying any charitable benefactions; or obliging the poor to work upon hard terms, particularly in towns of trade, or where any manufacture is carried on; or refusing to pay those wages which they have earn’d by the sweat of their brows;

a sordid and cruel practice, which the prophet Isaiah expresses by “ grinding the face of the poor ! * ” And what can be a more monstrous abuse of those great advantages in wealth and power which God, with a quite different intention, was pleas'd to bestow ?

And what stronger symptom can there be of an ungenerous, unmanly, and unchristian spirit, than to trample upon those who are already down ; and to use violence, insult and oppression, where not the least resistance can be made ? A behaviour this, which calls aloud for the divine vengeance, and will certainly, sooner or later, bring it down ! “ Rob not the poor (says the wise man) because he is poor, neither oppress the afflicted in the gate ; for the Lord will plead their cause, and will spoil the soul of those that spoiled them. † ”

In short, all contemptuous, overbearing or oppressive behaviour thwarts and opposes the scheme of providence, which bestows

* Is. iii. 15.

† Prov. xxii. 22.

bestows on some a larger portion of this world's possessions, that they might be qualified,—not to oppress and trample upon their necessitous brethren, (for brethren we all are) but to protect, assist and relieve them.

Indispensably oblig'd, therefore, are the great and wealthy to be condescending, courteous and charitable to their inferiors, “as good stewards of the manifold grace “(or bounty) of God *” thus plenteously confer'd on them in particular, and which the gracious donor never intended they should confine merely to their own use, but employ a due proportion for the support of those who not only want, but deserve relief: not to encourage laziness or indolence; but to strengthen the efforts of honest industry; and to help those who cannot, in a competent manner, help themselves.

And as the influence which attends on wealth and power is most extensively prevailing; and governs, in a great measure,

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both

* 1 Pet. iv. 10.

both the principles and morals of the meaner sort : consequently they are no less accountable for the use they make of this influence, than for the application of that wealth which providence has intrusted them with.

As we must suppose them to have enjoyed the advantages of a liberal education, they cannot well be strangers to any of the duties of religion : and if their inclination were but equal to their power of instructing those who are subject to their influence ; one word from them would prevail more, with some, than all the most instructive sermons of the most eloquent preacher.

'Tis in their power to recommend instruction by their own conspicuous example, and still more strongly to enforce it by dispensing favours to those who behave well ; and expressing, upon all occasions, their disapprobation and abhorrence of their conduct who dare to behave otherwise.

That both the religious sentiments, and moral behaviour of inferiors are strongly

influenc'd by those above them—is plain and obvious to every observer.

Thus profelytes are frequently gain'd to the church of Rome, not by dint of reason, or the resistless force of argument, but by the encouragements which are lavishly bestow'd by some family of distinction in the neighbourhood ; by those who spare no pains, and no expence in advancing the cause of their religion ; where to gain one convert is a meritorious performance, whatever may be the motives of his conversion. But where there are no such examples, and no such allurements, all remain firm to the persuasion in which they were brought up.

And thus too, where those of higher rank are duly regular in attending the public worship of God, all who dwell near them, and particularly those who are at all dependent, will be eager to imitate the pious example ; it will really excite the imitation of all who are not quite abandon'd.

But if, on the other hand, they are negligent and remiss in discharging so important and necessary a duty ; the contagion spreads, and will spread ; will baffle all instruction, and frustrate all endeavours that may come from another quarter.

Such is the influence which wealth and power are sure to create, after what manner soever that influence is exerted. It may do much good, or much harm : may be greatly serviceable to the cause of religion, and, consequently, the happiness of human society, or greatly prejudicial. However, they who possess this influence are strictly accountable for the use they make of it. God has intrusted them with it, in this state of trial, and a due exertion of it will certainly be required at their hands. If they make a proper use of it, great and glorious will be their reward ; if not, they involve themselves in deep personal guilt, and become, in some measure, chargeable with the guilt of those whom either their bad example has seduced, or whom their good example might have reclaimed.

Not

Not that the meaner sort will stand excused for their misconduct, merely because their superiors do wrong. Whoever commits sin provokes the divine displeasure, and becomes obnoxious to future punishment. But the guilt of sin is heighten'd, or extenuated, in proportion to mens knowledge or ignorance of their duty. And the rich may well be imagin'd to have a more perfect knowledge of it than they who have been meanly educated: and, consequently, have more to answer for, if, in opposition to the clear dictates of conscience, they go astray.

However, in this knowing age, few are so very ignorant as not to be capable of distinguishing betwixt right and wrong, and of discerning, with sufficient clearness, what paths they ought to pursue, and what to avoid. But they are willing to catch at any excuse, and flatter themselves that they may safely tread in the paths of their superiors who know their duty so much better. Their superiors, therefore, for the sake of others, as well as themselves, should

should take the strictest care never to lay such strong inducements to evil before their eyes; since they must know the force of their own influence, and the wretched consequences, both with regard to the sentiments and practice of their inferiors, which their misconduct, especially in public life, is sure to introduce!

And if superiors were duly conscientious in discharging this their obvious duty, reformation of conduct would be almost universal. If debauchery, corruption, luxury and prophaneness were once banish'd out of high life, the morals of the meaner sort would be proportionately regular and virtuous. Such examples would both restrain them from wickedness, and preserve them from distress. And all the hardships which providence lays them under would be sure to meet with a suitable degree of compassion and relief.

Such are the duties which the rich owe to the poor. Whilst they, on the other hand, must never be deficient in paying the respect and deference due to those
whom

whom the divine providence has placed above them.

Since God himself has appointed such a variety of circumstances and stations, to support the order, and secure the happiness, of society : an obligation is fix'd upon all of inferior rank to behave consistently with that rank, in due subordination to all their superiors : free from every envious and spiteful thought, and from every instance of behaviour that looks like perverse opposition, rudeness or disrespect : abstaining from the property of their wealthier neighbours, " not only for wrath, " but also for conscience sake : " never sacrificing their time to laziness, that time—which to them is precious in a double respect ; but, by an honest and laborious industry, doing their duty in that humble state of life to which it has pleased God to call them : supported under all the hardships of their present situation by a firm and lively hope of future recompence, thro' the merits of their Redeemer, whose hardships and whose sufferings, whilst he dwelt amongst

amongst us, were, beyond all comparison, severer than their own !

Always remembering that “ better is a
“ little with the fear of the Lord, than
“ great treasure, and trouble there-
“ with. * ”

And that (in our Lord's parable) the poor man who, in his life-time, had received so large a share of evil things, was convey'd by angels into Abraham's bosom † : whilst he who had enjoyed a constant flow of prosperity, and had fared sumptuously every day, was plunged into a state of torment never to be remov'd or mitigated !

It must not, however, be imagin'd that the one was accepted merely for his poverty, or the other condemn'd merely for his riches : but that their fate was determin'd agreeably to their behaviour under each condition.

Riches are not, of themselves, any obstruction to future happiness ; nor is poverty, of itself, any recommendation to it.

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* Prov. xv. 16.

† Luke xvi. 19.

The patriarch Abraham, into whose bosom Lazarus was convey'd, was one of the richest men in all the east. And the poor must have other qualifications for future bliss besides the hardships they endure in the present life.

Rich and poor, with regard to their spiritual interest, are placed upon a level; equally capable of grace here, and glory hereafter. But then, each must be careful to make suitable preparations, and to perform the duties peculiar to their respective conditions, so as to gain the applause of that God who is "the maker of them all."

Riches are attended with the power of doing much good to our fellow-creatures; and in this respect have greatly the advantage of a meaner state.

If this power be well applied, and properly exerted, it will be crown'd with a proportionate reward: if not, it will only serve to condemn the ungrateful possessor.

Poverty

Poverty has many hardships ! but then 'tis exempt from many temptations and dangers which a wealthier state is exposed to.

In short, each condition shares its peculiar advantages, as well as its peculiar difficulties and trials.

But he alone is happy in this life, and will be infinitely more happy in the next, who makes the will of Providence his own : who, in whatever state he may be situated, strives to obey the laws of his Creator ; to be as serviceable as his circumstances will admit to all his fellow-creatures : goes on, with chearful resolution, in the paths of virtue ; and fixes his firm reliance on the merits and intercession of his compassionate Redeemer “ who (as the apostle observes) tho' he “ was rich, yet for our sakes he became “ poor, that we, thro' his poverty, might “ be rich. * ”

To him, therefore, &c.

* 2 Cor. viii. 9.

S E R-

SERMON XIX.

On ALMS-GIVING.

GAL. vi. 10.

As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially to them who are of the household of faith.

OF that charity, or universal benevolence, which is the peculiar characteristic of our religion—one important and essential branch is the duty of Almsgiving, of contributing, in proportion to the power and opportunity we enjoy, to the relief and support of our indigent fellow-creatures.

A branch, so very essential as frequently to assume the title of that sublime and
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extensive virtue from which it is derived.

'Tis a needless task to prove our obligation to a duty so frequently and emphatically urged in the word of life; and particularly in that collection of sentences in the communion-service which is repeated, by way of exhortation, whilst the people are offering their alms and oblations at the altar: our charitable relief of those in distress being a proper introduction to that sacred pledge of our universal benevolence, the holy sacrament.

My chief design, therefore, in the present discourse, is to consider, and point out, the properest methods of performing this duty; and then, to enforce the practice of it by the strong and prevailing motives of pleasure and advantage.

I. As to the former of these considerations,

1. We are to regard the measures and proportion of our charitable beneficence:

2. The fitness of the objects 'tis confer'd upon:

3. The

3. The manner of conferring it.

1. The measure of giving ought always to be proportionate to the abilities of the giver. "If thou hast much, give plentifully; if thou hast little, do thy diligence gladly to give of that little." In this case, 'tis impossible to prescribe particular rules. Every one must fix them for himself, as being the only competent judge of his own circumstances.

Give me leave, however, to observe, that were our inclination equal to our power, few of us would find ourselves utterly unqualified to be, in some measure, assistant to our necessitous brethren. Our blessed Lord himself, tho' supported by the contributions of those who (as the evangelist tells us) "minister'd unto him of their substance; *" neglected not to reserve a share, or to keep a sort of treasury, for the poor and helpless. †

It may not, indeed, be in our power to relieve so large a number as we could wish; nor even to relieve a few in propor-

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tion

* Luke viii. 3.

† John xiii. 29.

tion to their urgent necessity : but still we may do something ; sufficient, at least, to testify our kind intention, and our willingness to do more, had we but the power of doing it.

Let us not then be restrained, either by the sense of shame, or a despair of future reward, from giving something, tho' we give but little. But let us comfort ourselves with this reflexion—that “ if there
“ be first a willing mind, 'tis accepted
“ according to that a man hath, and not
“ according to that he hath not. * ”

Thus, the widow's mite, † tho' an offering despicable in itself, was yet a bounteous one in the sight of God, since, in proportion to her circumstances, she contributed more generously than they all, who out of their abundance gave abundantly.

Even “ a cup of cold water,” when given to one in distress, has its value enhanc'd by the disposition of the giver, and

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the

* 2 Cor. viii. 12. † Luke xxi. 3.

the kind, tho' mean, relief "shall in no
"wise lose it's reward. †"

2. In the choice of objects, we must follow the dictates of reason and religion. And from reason we learn, that they, who are in any degree allied to us, demand a preference before those who bear not the same relation.

That they who live near us, and fall within the compass of personal knowledge, have a juster claim to our bounty than they who come from far. The distresses of the former we ourselves must, in some sort, be conscious to. Whilst the others may take advantage of our ignorance, and impose upon our good-natur'd credulity by false representations.

Thus too, they who are of our own religion, as they naturally share a priority in our esteem, so (as the apostle intimates in the words before us) they ought, if equally necessitous, to share a priority in our beneficence.

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† Matt. x. 42.

If of the same religion, and under equal circumstances of distress; regard must be had to their morals, and character in life.

Some there are who, tho' harmless, pious, and industrious too, yet, by accidental losses, or a numerous family, are exposed to the hardships of a penurious state, and are render'd incapable of supporting themselves without the kind assistance of their charitable neighbours.

Others there are whose necessities are either a natural consequence of their sloth, or the just punishment of their crimes. In these cases, reason points out our choice, and religion approves and confirms it.

Some regard should likewise be had, some distinction made, in relation to the tempers of those who stand in need.

Many there are who, without the least shock or confusion, can both discover and aggravate their wants; can summon the arts of persuasion to their aid, or, by an urgent clamorous importunity, can extort relief. Whilst others, tho' perhaps in deeper

deeper distress, cannot, without the utmost uneasiness and pain, reveal their hardships; are ashamed to own their poverty, and can more easily endure the extremities of want, than assume the confidence to beg.

We may, if we chuse to be severe and ill-natur'd, impute this to pride; but it will be much more consistent with our christian character to call it modesty: it is, indeed, a weakness, perhaps a faulty one; but if it be, it is what they suffer a daily penance for, and therefore ought, in some measure, to be conniv'd at, and even indulg'd,

These are certainly more deserving objects of our charity than the bold, the noisy and importunate; since they stand not half so good a chance of meeting with relief, let their wants be never so pressing.

And when we discover any objects of this sort, it will heighten the pleasure of giving, and add to the merit of the gift, if we are so compassionate as to anticipate their confusion, and prevent the pain which

application would create, by giving unask'd.

And as our beneficence should be directed not only to the advantage of the receiver in particular, but of society in general : hence we may convince ourselves how highly proper it is to give to those who will convert the donation to proper uses, and lay it out to the best advantage, both of themselves and their families.

And as idleness is the bane and ruin of society, not merely consider'd as useless and unprofitable in itself, but also as introductive of every species of wickedness : hence appears the great impropriety of giving to those who, having been train'd up to nothing but indolence and sloth, have contracted an habitual aversion to work or confinement ; and therefore choose to wander about from place to place, and to depend on the precarious assistance of others, rather than the honest endeavours of their own hands.

To encourage such as these is to encourage idleness, and is really acting in
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contradiction to the laws both of God and man; to the laws of God, since we have a positive direction from St. Paul, "that
" if any one will not work, so neither let
" him eat: *" if he will take no pains to support himself, let him starve rather than have his laziness supported by the mistaken charity of others.

And no less inconsistent is it with the laws of man: witness the several acts of parliament made, in several successive reigns, in order to restrain vagrants, and confine them to their own settlements; to reduce the noisy swarms of common beggars, that are a nuisance to our streets and doors, a disgrace to our country, and a keen reproach, tho' not to our laws, at least to the execution of them: for laws of this kind have been in force for 160 years; nor are we to consider the present act as a modern institution, but an old one reviv'd, and, perhaps, somewhat improv'd; and, how severe soever it may seem at first

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* 2 Theff. iii. 10.

view, is calculated for the public good, nay, even for the good of those lazy wretches whom 'tis level'd at.

These rules, indeed, are of a general nature, and (as all such rules are) liable to some exceptions ; limitations, at least.

Thus, if they who are not allied to us are in deeper distress than those that are ; partiality ought not to bias us so strongly in favour of the one, as to restrain our beneficence to the other : nor should we then be influenc'd so much by natural affection, as by the circumstances of those who crave our aid.

Thus too, tho' we have more inclination, and more encouragement to relieve those who live near us, as running a less hazard of being impos'd on ; yet it may sometimes happen, that they who are altogether strangers to us may be more real objects of our charity than the petitioners of our acquaintance :—When having their lives, and only their lives, preserv'd from shipwreck ; or when persecuted, and driven out of their native land on the score
of

of religion ; or when seiz'd with illness at a distance from their home : in cases of this nature, if they come recommended with proper testimonials, or discover in themselves the symptoms of sincerity, so as to raise in us no just suspicion of imposture ; to refuse relief were both ungenerous and inhuman.

And with regard to importunity, it may not always proceed from forwardness and bold assurance, but from an extreme pressure of distress emphatically pleading for relief !

We are all of us, indeed, liable to be imposed upon by an artful affectation of distress, and a plausible appearance of veracity. This naturally makes us cautious in relieving strangers. But it should not induce us to extend our caution too far, lest we should sometimes turn away those who are real objects.

Much less should it serve as an excuse for relieving no strangers at all ; since, by this means, we are sure to lose many opportunities of doing good ; and betray, at the

the same time, a narrow, sordid temper, willing to lay hold on any pretence to screen its want of generosity.

Where our charity is convey'd thro' intermediate hands, and, consequently, the management or application of it becomes precarious: we should not then so much regard whom we give to, as, with what intent we give: and if our well-intended munificence miscarry in the application, the miscarriage affects not us; it neither sinks the merit of the gift, nor precludes the future reward of the giver.

2. Proceed we therefore to consider the motives to this duty, the powerful and prevailing motives—pleasure and advantage: not only the inviting prospect of that future joy, that reversionary bliss, which the word of God has firmly promised to those who exert this beneficence; but also the immediate, instantaneous pleasure which arises from the exertion itself.

And not only the hope of that future reward which we find annex'd to almost every exhortation to this duty: but also the

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temporal and present advantages promised to all those who are willing to do good, and eager to communicate in proportion to the power and opportunity they enjoy.

1. That the charitable man has always a mutual share in the pleasure which his generous kindness imparts to others—is usually observed by writers on this subject; and our own experience ('tis to be hoped) has still more convincingly assur'd us. Joy, thus inspir'd into the heart of the poor and helpless, is sure to recoil back upon the heart of him from whose compassionate generosity it was deriv'd. Then too, by relieving others, we at the same time relieve ourselves; relieve that uneasy sensation, that sympathetic pain, which is naturally and unavoidably excited in us when conscious of another's misery; and feel, in the room of it, an inward, sincere, and exalted satisfaction, a pleasure peculiar to those who give ease to the oppress'd, and chearfulness to those who droop and are dejected, are languishing on a bed of
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unattended sickness, or sinking under the pressure of innocent poverty !

Certainly no pleasure equal to this pleasure can arise from any other method of bestowing our superfluous wealth, even tho' the motive to bestowing it be altogether innocent : much less when the case is otherwise, as too frequently we see it ; when the bounties of providence (which we, as stewards not proprietors, must one day strictly account for the application of) are ungratefully abused, and made subservient to humour, pride and luxury, to sinful indulgences, or vain amusements ; where the pleasure is sure to die with the gratification, and, perhaps, is converted into inward pain, and the bitter anguish of remorse !

Whilst charitable beneficence not only gives a present pleasure, but regales the mind with fresh satisfaction, whenever it recurs to our thoughts.

The pleasure of thus giving is as great as that of receiving ; perhaps much greater : since to receive favours, at least such fa-

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vours as we have no prospect of returning, may give a generous mind no small concern and pain. Whereas the pleasure of giving is exposed to no other uneasiness than what may arise from our want of power to give more suitably to our own wishes, and the necessities of those to whom we give.

2. And that all they, whose inordinate fondness for this world's vain possessions makes them dread the thought of diminishing those possessions; whilst all their compassion is stifled and superseded by selfishness and avarice: that even they may be induced to be kind and generous to their indigent fellow-creatures; be it observ'd and remember'd, that no one duty has so many promises of temporal blessings annex'd to it as the duty now recommended.

To repeat a few of the most obvious:
“blessed is he that considereth the poor
“and needy, the Lord shall deliver him
“in the time of trouble. The Lord shall
“preserve him, and keep him alive, that
“he

“ he may be blessed upon earth : * ” may enjoy all the happiness which this present life can yield, besides the assurances of future bliss.

And again, “ tho’ the righteous has dispersed abroad, and given to the poor ; “ tho’ he is ever merciful and lendeth ; ” tho’ studious to extend his generous kindness to the helpless and distress’d : his generosity, instead of reducing him or his posterity to want, shall derive a blessing upon both. “ Blessed is he, and blessed “ likewise shall his seed be, and mighty “ upon earth.”

And in this sense we must explain that paradox or seeming contradiction in the proverbs of Solomon, where the inspir’d author tells us, “ there is that scattereth, “ and yet increaseth, and there is that “ withholdeth more than is meet, but it “ tendeth to poverty. † ” As if he had said, the charitable man, tho’ his beneficence be lavish and diffusive, and, in all appearance, too lavish for his circumstances ; is yet, by the divine blessing, crowned

* Ps. xli. 1.

† Prov. xi. 24.

crowned with an improvement of affluence and plenty : whilst the sordid tenacious wretch, who will not open his hand for fear of diminishing his store, is reduced to want, “ in vain rises up early, “ late takes rest, and eats the bread of “ carefulness ;” since, as the blessing of God prospers not the work of his hands, he sinks, unpitied, into that miserable state which he pawns his duty to avoid !

Not so the generous and beneficent : for, as the wiseman immediately subjoins, “ the liberal soul shall be made fat ; and “ he that watereth, shall be watered also “ himself. *” The more he bestows, the richer he will prove ; and in proportion to the pleasure he takes in doing good, the power of doing it shall increase.

And, as to sell corn in time of scarcity, to part with it on reasonable terms to those who cannot purchase it otherwise, is a shining instance of public-spiritedness, and an act of generous beneficence to all the meaner sort : whilst, on the other hand

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* Prov. xi. 25.

to ingross, monopolize, or hoard it up, with a view of an exorbitant future advantage, betrays an inhuman selfishness, and fordid cruelty: this author adds, in the next verse, "he that withholdeth corn shall have the people's curse; but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it. *"

In sublimer strain, tho' to the same purpose, speaks the prophet Isaiah. "If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, if thou relieve and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon-day: the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. †"

Let these few quotations be sufficient to convince us, that a generous relief of those in distress has the promises of this life, as well as of that to come.

And

* Prov. xi. 26.

† Is. lviii. 10.

And hence let those who refuse to part with any of their superfluous wealth in prospect of being amply rewarded in a future state ; who are unwilling to hazard (what they esteem) a certain enjoyment for so distant a reversion ; or, at least, flatter themselves with the hope of gaining heaven upon cheaper terms : let such be induc'd to pursue, at once, their duty and their interest in cultivating a virtue so beneficial to themselves, as well as others ; and, at the same time, taste a pleasure which they have hitherto been so imprudent, perverse and impious, as to debar themselves from.

Considering farther, that riches thus bestow'd are the only durable riches, and such as will follow us, even beyond the grave.

That whatever satisfaction the precarious treasures of this world may regale us with ; what respect and distinction soever they may procure to us ; during our short continuance upon earth ; yet alas ! we must

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carry

carry nothing away with us when we die, neither shall any of our pomp follow us!

That what we thus disburse not only yields a substantial pleasure here, but will also introduce us to infinitely more substantial pleasure hereafter: whilst what we leave behind us may fall into the possession of—we know not whom; and be applied—we know not how!

That when all the expences we have devoted to the indulgence of our sensual appetites, or lavish'd on the superfluities of diet or dress, shall, together with these perishable bodies which they were meant to gratify and adorn, sink and moulder in the dust:

When all that we have laid out upon conveniences, improvements and decorations; upon elegant structures, gardens, equipage, &c. shall, together with the power of enjoying such objects, be for ever lost to us:

Then, the little we have dedicated to charitable uses will still remain an inexhausted fund of inward satisfaction, an

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undecaying and eternal treasure laid up for us in those regions of security and peace, " where neither rust nor moth doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break thro' and steal: *"

Will be a firm foundation of hope and pious assurance against the day of necessity; against that solemn and alarming day, when the great enquiry will be—not how gaily and sumptuously we have liv'd here below; not how splendid an appearance we have made on the stage of this world; not how large an heap of wealth we have treasured up, nor how much obsequiousness and deference that wealth procur'd to us; but how properly we have manag'd that share of affluence which the divine goodness vouchsafed to entrust us with?

When the love we bear to our Redeemer (who will then assume the character of our judge) will be measur'd by the kindness we have display'd to the indigent and helpless; since inasmuch as we have exerted our charity to the least (the meanest and

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most

* Matt. vi. 19.

most forlorn) of these whom, how de-
picable soever in appearance, he conde-
scends to call his brethren, he will esteem
it as exerted to himself, and will crown
the generous beneficence with high ap-
plause, and an exceeding great reward :
will address all those who have lov'd him
(and have testified the sincerity of that
love by loving and relieving their necessitous
fellow-creatures) with that gracious and
blissful sentence " come, ye blessed chil-
dren of my Father, inherit the kingdom
" prepared for you from the beginning of
" the world."

Which happy allotment that we may
all of us have a share in,

God of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

S E R-

SERMON XX.

On the pursuit and reward of
RIGHTEOUSNESS.

MATT. v. 6,

*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst
after righteousness: for they shall be
filled.*

TIS the wild assertion of some enthusiastic writers, that to perform the duties of religion with a view of future recompence is a slavish, mean and mercenary principle, and inconsistent with the character of a sincere christian, of one whose heart is duly warm'd with a true filial love of his Creator. They

have even gone so far as to pronounce it sinful.

To call this enthusiasm, indeed, is to use a softening term: since it contradicts the obvious meaning of several passages in holy writ, where we find our duty enforced by rewards both temporal and eternal; where 'tis not only allow'd but even enjoined "to press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus;" and, by patient continuance in well-doing, to aspire after the promised crown of glory, honour and immortality.

Then too, in thus animating our pious ambition, and giving a keener edge to our pursuit, we imitate those heroic patterns of faith and perseverance recorded by St. Paul as having * respect to the recompence of reward in all they did or suffer'd: and even the Son of God himself, "who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame. †"

As

* Heb. xi.

† Heb. xii. 2.

As therefore the gracious author of our being has been pleased to propose to us the great and glorious rewards of a future state, in order to excite and confirm our obedience: 'tis certainly our duty to obey him in prospect of those rewards; with a view of that consummate bliss in the enjoyment of Him which, in this life, we are debar'd from.

'Tis not for us to neglect or disregard any assistances which He, who best knows our inward frame, has thought proper to afford us. Our endeavours after future happiness, and the qualifications requisite thereto, are alas! much too cold and languid, tho' thus powerfully excited! how sluggish then would be our indolence, how faint our resolutions, if not buoy'd up with a firm expectation of future recompence, of being amply rewarded in another life, for all our sufferings, or self-denial, in this!

Our blessed Lord, we may observe, in order to animate his audience to the cultivation of those virtues, and religious qua-

fications which form the beginning of his sermon on the mount, has annex'd to each of those virtues a suitable reward, and gives the character of blessed to all who are possess'd of them; and, at the same time, ascribes their blessedness to the sure and certain reward that would await them.

Thus in the sentence I have now made choice of, "blessed, says he, are they" which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

Proceed we therefore to take a view

1. Of the nature and meaning of the qualification here mention'd : and
2. The extent and sublimity of the reward annex'd to it.

Righteousness, in the passage before us, may well be supposed to include christian perfection; or, in other terms, a sincere and unreserved obedience to the revealed will of God: fervent zeal with regard to our Creator; generous benevolence with regard to our fellow-creatures; sobriety and self-denial with regard to ourselves.

And as hunger and thirst are two of the most restless and impatient appetites belonging to our nature : so, to hunger and thirst after this perfection must needs imply the utmost eagerness of desire to attain it : such a desire as will induce us to think no application too strict, no instance of self-restraint too severe : such as will make us impatient to subdue every sinful inclination, and to suppress every thought that is not consistent with the purity of the gospel. Inwardly deploring the infirmities of our nature ; the coldness of our devotions ; the faintness of our efforts and resolutions ; and the slow progress we make towards that happy frame of mind which we so earnestly long to obtain ! striving, at the same time, by fervent prayer to invite and procure the assistance of divine grace, which alone can relieve the imperfections we labour under, remove the obstructions that retard our course, and make us such as our profession requires us to be,

“ Blessed

“Blessed are all they who thus hunger
“and thirst after righteousness, for they
“shall certainly be filled ;” shall have their
pious desires fully gratified, and be what
they wish to be ; shall gradually arrive at
that happy frame of mind, that fervent
love of God, and that unbiaſ’d obedience
to his will, which they so eagerly aspire
after !

And a pursuit, thus wisely directed,
is sure of being crown’d with happiness,
both in this life and the next.

No scruple can arise upon this account,
if we duly consider the goodness of that
God “who would have all men to be
saved ; and who created us for no other
purpose than to serve him in righteousness
and true holiness all the days of our present
life, and to enjoy the full reward of right-
eousness in the life to come : who gra-
ciously affords us sufficient means of grace,
and excites us to apply them by the sure
and certain hope of glory : who sent his
only-begotten Son into the world to point
out the way wherein we should go, and
to

to leave us an example that we should follow his steps, and "be made the righteousness of God in him:*" who, by the influence of his Holy Spirit, warms the soul with devout and pious inclinations, and ceases not to assist and strengthen us in this our glorious pursuit.

These assistances, if joined with a due concurrence of our own desires and endeavours, will effectually enable us to make a suitable progress in the paths of duty, to gain the acceptance of our God, and, in consequence thereof, serenity of mind in this life, and eternal happiness in a future one.

With regard to our pursuits after this world's enjoyments, the case is widely different. For tho' deluded man generally exerts more active industry, and takes far greater pains to secure his temporal, than his eternal interest; yet the attainment of what he so eagerly pursues is precarious and uncertain at best. The wise man has long ago observed, "that the race is not
"always

* 2 Cor. v. 21.

“ always to the swift, nor the battle to
“ the strong, neither yet bread to the
“ wise, nor yet riches to men of under-
“ standing, nor yet favour to men of
“ skill, but time and chance happeneth
“ to them all. * ”

Strength of genius, when seconded by a prudent and industrious application, must be allow'd to bid fair for success, in almost any attempt. But how far it frequently is from procuring that success, experience will inform us.

Tho' our schemes be never so well concerted, tho' never so prudently and strenuously pursued ; some cross accident may still intervene, and blast the whole design !

Villainy itself, the most hypocritical and artful villainy, tho' it may seem to take the most sure, as well as the most compendious, road to riches or grandeur, frequently disappoints the wretch who employs it, and leaves him the regret of a deluded

* Eccl. ix. 11.

deluded hope, together with the pangs of a self-tormenting conscience. Nor does disappointment remove, or even diminish the eagerness of his desires: the cravings of his depraved mind still remain in their full force, and give him much the same sort of uneasiness as those unhappy sufferers feel, who being hungry and thirsty in a literal sense, and almost ready to expire for want of nourishment, can meet with nothing to relieve them!

Whilst he who hungereth not for the meat which perisheth, for the empty and unsatisfying enjoyments of this world, but for that meat which endureth to eternal life, may, to his comfort, be assured, that the pious desire will be fully indulged, and that he shall not be disappointed of his hope.

And when he has once obtained that righteous and devout disposition which he so ardently wished for; when his soul is duly warmed with a sincere love of God; when, thro' the assistance of divine grace, he is able to restrain all irregular passions,
and

and can feed his mind with a well grounded expectation of future bliss: he may then look down with contempt upon all the vain pomp and splendour of this world, since all its pleasures are trifling in comparison of that joy which he feels in his own breast; a joy, which no man taketh, or can take from him.

This administers a cure for every grief, and improves and sanctifies every enjoyment. "Whether a man be rich or poor" (says the son of Sirach) if he have a "good heart toward the Lord, he shall" "at all times rejoice with a chearful countenance.*" Amidst all circumstances, and all events, the serenity of his mind remains undisturbed: a good conscience is his strong support, a fountain of joy, whose waters fail not.

Difficulties, indeed, may and will arise, numerous temptations will assault him, to damp, if possible, his religious pursuit. To struggle with these, and particularly at first, must needs be attended with strong uneasi-

* Ecclus. xxvi. 4.

uneasiness and pain. But when, by the divine assistance, he has firmly sustained the assault; the pleasure of his triumph overbalances all the pain he before endur'd; and the future reflections which arise in his breast give him an infinitely more pleasing sensation than the indulgence could possibly have done: and with this essential difference, that whereas the wild and giddy transport of sinful gratification is momentary in itself, and immediately succeeded by remorse and anguish; the serene pleasure which naturally attends the consciousness of virtue, and more particularly after a severe trial, is ever improving on the mind, and brightens the prospect of that future crown of righteousness which God, the righteous judge, will give at that day.

Besides, the violence of temptation will gradually wear off. Every conquest we obtain over the assaults of the tempter, or the strength of our own rebellious passions, adds to our own power, and weakens that of the enemy. And the encouragements

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derived from former success will arm and prepare us against future attacks. So shall we arrive at that happy freedom, and peace of mind ; that pleasing security in the divine protection ; and that inward assurance of future reward, which constitutes our sublimest felicity on this side heaven !

A soul thus established in righteousness no terrors can alarm, no calamities depress. Whilst they whose desires are otherwise directed, whose chief ambition, at least whose chief pursuit, it is to secure the enjoyments of the present life, are, " like " a wave of the sea, driven with the wind " and tossed." Ever dissatisfied, and uneasy in themselves, even when exciting the envy of other people. But the righteous man, tho' perhaps pitied by others, is happy in himself ; much more happy than this world and all that is therein, can make him.

The most splendid and affluent state on earth will be found to fall infinitely short of making the possessor happy, will not even hinder him from being most deplorably

ably miserable, if not attended with a consciousness of the divine favour, and a comfortable hope of being receiv'd into bliss in another life, when constrained to leave this.

But when the mind can, with secret satisfaction, look beyond the grave, and contemplate eternity : then, and only then, are we qualified to relish the pleasures of life, as well as to support the various uneasinesses and troubles which usually attend it.

This alone can enable us to live with satisfaction, and to die with decency, and with comfort : free from the violent reluctance of those whose desires have been too strongly attach'd to the vain enjoyments which they are now forc'd to quit for ever !

To such as these, death comes doubly formidable : as it tears them from the pleasures they so passionately lov'd and pursued ; and plunges them into a state which they cannot bear to think of !

Whilst the righteous man, whose constant study it has been to " lay up in store

“ a good foundation against that day of
“ necessity,” that gloomy and alarming
day, when we shall stand in need of the
strongest consolations to support our faint-
ing spirits, shall receive the strongest con-
solations from his God, and his own con-
science; and shall “ lift up his head,” in
pious and enlivening hope, as knowing
that “ his redemption draweth nigh.”
That, tho’ torn away from his surviving
acquaintance, he is going to enjoy the so-
ciety of angels, and “ of just men made
“ perfect,” particularly of those relations
and friends who have finish’d their course
before him, and have already “ enter’d in-
“ to the joy of their Lord :” that the state
of existence which he is now upon the
point of leaving will immediately be suc-
ceeded by another infinitely more eligible,
where pain and grief enter not, and the
voice of mourning is never heard ! where
there is one continued scene of pleasure,
such as never fatiates, and never fades !

Sooth’d and supported by this enliven-
ing prospect he considers death, not as an
enemy,

enemy, but a real friend ; as relieving him from misery, and introducing him into bliss.

He calmly resigns his soul into the hands of his merciful creator ; and dies in such a manner as all wish to die, even they who are far from pursuing the paths that lead to so desirable an end ; as if they could hope to obtain the crown of righteousness without the previous practice of it.

Thus is the righteous man fill'd and satisfied with inward peace, thro' all the stages of his journey in this vale of tears ; and not only so, but (when such a happy frame of mind is of most use) at his departure out of it.

And when the bitterness of death is once overpast, the moment his soul is dis-united from the body, and, amidst the acclamations of angels and saints, admitted into that state of bliss which his eagerest desires were all along directed to ; he then finds that all the pains he has employ'd in the attainment of righteousness are more than recompensed ; that his reward infi-

nately exceeds, not only his highest expectations, but even his highest desires.

He is now placed beyond the reach of all temptation, disappointment and anxiety. For ever fix'd in those blissful regions, where all is safety, peace, and joy; harmony and love! where he "shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more: " for the lamb which is in the midst of " the throne shall feed him, and shall " lead him unto living fountains of waters.*"

" How (inconceivably) amiable are thy (more immediate) " dwellings, thou Lord " of hosts!" what soul hath not a desire, and even longing to enter thy celestial courts, to be always enjoying, and always praising thee!

This, indeed, is a happiness which we cannot help desiring. But, the misfortune is, our desires are so faint, at least, they so faintly influence our conduct, as to suffer the enjoyments of the present life
to

* Rev. vii. 16, 17.

to gain the ascendent, and to bias our pursuit.

Hungring and thirsting for that which can never satisfy, and neglecting to secure our only true bliss, we “walk in a vain shadow, and disquiet ourselves in vain!” perplex’d with uncertainty, and liable to numberless disappointments, whilst striving to obtain our wish; and disappointed, even when we do obtain it! so far is the wish’d-for possession from giving us the pleasure we expected from it, that it palls upon the mind almost as soon as obtain’d. And yet, so strong is our infatuation, that tho’ we are thus constantly disappointed; tho’ we find our endeavours so wretchedly misapplied; we can still think of renewing the vain pursuit; still deluded, and still exposing ourselves to fresh delusion!

Whereas, on the other hand, were we but so prudent as to set our affections, our warmest affections, “on things above;” and take due care not to deviate from the paths that lead to the attainment of them;

we

we should then effectually secure, at once, our present, and our future happiness.

Amidst the various disappointments which promiscuously happen to the righteous and unrighteous in the present life; we still should have the comfort and pleasure of reflecting, that tho' our temporal interest or happiness lies at the mercy of a thousand various accidents; obnoxious to the malice, treachery, fickleness or ingratitude of our fellow-creatures: our sublimest and eternal interest is, or may be, still secure; independent of all accidents; and beyond the power either of our open enemies, or the more dangerous intrigues of false friends, to baffle or obstruct.

Hence, and only hence, are we sure to enjoy an undisturbed serenity of mind, let our earthly lot be what it will.

So shall we smoothly glide thro' the waves of this troublesome world, without having our expectation, or our patience shipwreck'd.

So shall we procure for ourselves a firm and never-failing support under all the
various

various afflictions in life, and even the terrors and pains of death.

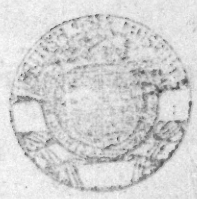
And lastly, thro' the merits of our Redeemer, we shall find a gracious admission into the presence of that God, "in
" whose presence there is the fulness of
" joy, and at whose right hand there are
" pleasures (unmix'd, uninterrupted pleasures) " for evermore !"

Amen !

T H E E N D.

of Righteousness.
 various afflictions in life, and even the
 terrors and pains of death.
 And lastly, thro' the merits of our Re-
 deemer, we shall find a gracious admis-
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 sures) for evermore."

Amen!



THE END

